

The Little Veela that Could

Prologue: Animancora and the Boy Who Died

October 31st, 1981

Contrary to current writings and 'knowledge' on the subjects of horcruxes, the objects are not inherently dark. Like any other form of magic, the level of 'Dark' or 'Light' within the existence of such an object is based on how it was made and why.

Nor is the object actually part of the soul of the creator. Horcruxes are truly soul anchors, able to prevent a soul from passing and capable of returning the dead to life if used properly. The original term for these objects before they were eternally classified as dark objects was animancora. Technically, one could make an unlimited number of animancora, though the act of creating them for good or ill is what transforms the creator and gives them the appearance of being either angelic (light) or monstrous (dark). Luckily very few beings ever tried to make more than one. The being known now as Satan was the first to reap the rewards of doing so.

Unfortunately for modern Wizarding kind, all ancient research by light healers and scholars on the properties and uses of animancora was alternately stolen and perverted by dark families for their own use or more commonly confiscated and destroyed/put in deep storage by various Ministries and Light Lords for having the appearance of being dark. The process had ties to light blood magics which were also wrongly classified as dark.

And so it was, that when Lily Potter sacrificed her own life for her son on that fateful night, her soul was anchored to the baby she was protecting. At that very moment, a minor blood ritual performed with the help of her baby son would indeed have returned the woman to the Land of the Living. No such attempt was made.

In fact, the last person alive to know that such an attempt would work was a wizard crucified by Pope Urban VI for the practice of Heresy. The Roman Catholics attempted to burn the wizard at the stake, only to find he would not burn. After tricking him into releasing his wand, crucifixion worked. Unfortunately for him, he knew of animancora but did not have one of his own.

Lily Potter, naughty little light witch that she was, had been doing research on light blood magics. Being muggleborn, she did not grow up with the by now traditional blood magic views of her pureblood husband, James. Her blood magic research provided her with a way to make a personal blood ward to defend against dark aggression of any form with the sacrifice of her own life. She used it.

When Voldemort's killing curse hit young Harry, it damaged Lily's animancora beyond repair, but did not overcome her blood ward. Voldemort's killing curse was intended to create a horcrux with Harry's death. In an unforeseen way, the attempt worked when Lily's animancora was destroyed and a new horcrux was created via the scar on baby Harry's head. Due to Lily's protections and her broken animancora, the curse bounced back to Voldemort and turned his own face into a scared animancora. Attached to Voldemort's misshapen nose was Harry's soul anchor. This accounts for the warped appearance of Tom's nose when he is reborn and also for much of his pissy mood. A happy Harry caused pain in Tom's nasal cavity just as a happy Tom caused Harry's scar to give him no end of misery. Over the years, Albus's placement of Harry with the Dursleys would ensure that Harry suffered for this much more than Tom did.

When Albus Dumbledore arrived seconds after the attack, he discovered Lily's open research journal and swiped it. You can't say 'Albus no swiping' three times quick if you are dead or a baby. He also used the power of his Elder Wand to change her blood warding scheme. Without the Headmaster's interference, the ward would have been an unbreakable shield for Harry, preventing all harm, but it would not protect anyone else. Albus, seeing this as a weakness, warped the ward by tying it to 4 Privet Drive with some of Lily's blood and some heavy charms work.

At that time, he could have tied the blood wards to just about any location and any foster home, but the Dursley family suited Albus's needs well. He then left and summoned Hagrid to retrieve the boy. This, he did for the Greater Good. Albus believed that Harry would be uncontrollable if Lily's blood ward was left in tact and he was left in a loving home. How could he guide the boy to his destiny if Harry did not know personal suffering enough to want to sacrifice himself? How could anyone survive long standing next to Harry Potter unless the ward was changed? The boy was nearly immortal with Lily's original ward, but anyone next to him was fair game.

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February 24th, 1995, 10:36

The Second Task (Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire, Chapter Twenty-Six, Page 502-3)

All around him, wild, green-haired heads were emerging out of the water with him, but they were not happy.

Merlin no! They were serious! Harry pushed Ron and the little silver haired girl forward as the green haired merpeople advanced on his back now that Harry was too busy pushing two confused hostages to pull his wand and defend himself. Harry could hear shouting from the stands, but it didn't matter when he was tired and near drowned and not quite back to safety. If only he could get Ron and the girl out of the water!

"Wet, this, isn't it?" Ron spotted Fleur's sister. "What did you bring her for?"

"No time to argue, Ron! Get to shore!" Harry was barely keeping his head above water with the struggle of holding on to an eight year old girl who herself seemed to be panicking bad with the appearance of so many angry merpeople at the surface. Her true fear was the number of green-haired spear wielding merpeople who must still be under them.

"Harry, you prat," said Ron, "you didn't take that song thing seriously, did you? Dumbledore wouldn't have let any of us drown!"

"It's not drown-"

"It was only to make sure you got back -" Ron, who had interrupted his 'best' mate, was interrupted. All three of them were surrounded by spear-carrying merpeople who'd looked more than capable of murder.

Before the three swimmers could move another inch, before the crowd or judges could lend any kind of support, one merman far larger and more muscular than the others surfaced between Ron and the other two. His sharp, gleaming spear pointed directly at the

little Veela's heart. Harry grabbed Fleur's sister and held her close. As weak as he was at the moment, she couldn't be any better off. A phoenix flashed into existence above the surface of the lake, but it was too late. Too late by far.

Pain. Horrible pain flooded through Harry's body as the merman's spear pinned the Boy-Who-Lived to Fleur's sister. Their chests touched, blood pooled and mixed from one body to the other. The deadly shaft extended through both of them and a good foot out past her spine.

Harry and the little Veela didn't see the horrified looks on Ron's face or hear the pained roar of the crowd. They didn't hear the curses and hexes sent from shore to maim and kill any merperson foolish enough to keep their head above water. They sank back into the water pinned together, staring into each others eyes.

Headmaster Albus Dumbledore raced Death itself to repair the grievous injury caused this morning. A large boat was transfigured from some floating debris by his urgent wand strokes before he and Madam Maxime both boarded the boat and magically propelled it to the last spot Harry Potter and Gabrielle Delacour were seen above water.

I'm going to die. Harry knew that his demise was only moments away. Fawkes could not save him here. Harry didn't believe phoenix tears could be applied accurately under water. Never mind on two patients impaled on the same shaft. If he tried to breath in one more time, his one functioning lung would only fill with water and seal his fate. Harry didn't mind so much anymore. His life was not worth the magic his parents had given him. In the whole of the Wizarding World, Harry could only count on one bushy-haired witch for true loyalty, even when his best mate accuses Harry of criminal acts and thoughts. And now he was dying with this little Veela girl – oh no! No no no no. Please Merlin, Jesus or Buddha, don't let this innocent girl die with me! A quick look into the girls eyes told him all he needed to know, she was as terrified and close to death as he was.

Mum did something once. Merlin, what did she do to save me? Harry didn't have any answer save love. Having no other miracle plan pop into his head, Harry set his course and acted.

The little Veela could only stare into the eyes of the boy she was pinned to as they sank back into the depths Black Lake. In her mind she screamed for her mother and her father and Fleur and the other grown-ups to come save her and Harry Potter. She knew who he was of course. Everyone did. And now they would die together in a tragedy for the ages; the despair filled idea swept away any thoughts of him saving her and them living in the ivory towers of a pristine castle surrounded by loving commoners as Prince Harry and Princess Gabrielle lived Happily Ever After. Please, Mommy! Save me! Save Harry! Please! Mommy, please! It was only as a distant sound began to become louder, somewhere above and behind her, that she saw Harry's countenance shift. The Boy-Who-Lived seemed to build up his courage for half a second before he opened his mouth one last time.

"I love you." It was the only French sentence any English speaking teenaged boy was guaranteed to learn. Only bubbles left his mouth, but Harry thought for just a second that the little girl might have understood. With no air left in his blood soaked lungs, Harry closed the distance between his lips and her forehead. Harry willed all of his life, love, happiness, hope, magic, anything, everything... all of it, was willed into that chaste kiss as Harry intoned in his own mind, *So Mote It Be*. And so it was.

The two school figureheads mounting a rescue attempt pulled the spear-joined pair out of the water ten seconds later. Gabrielle was revived, only to immediately start wailing as if her own sister had just died to save her.

Harry Potter was dead.

Prologue End

Chapter One: The Widow and the Mark

Hermione wouldn't cry. She couldn't. Since the end of the Second Task two days ago, Hermione had cried more and harder than at any time in her life. Hermione couldn't speak. Two days of crying, pleading and begging for someone to wake her up, to wake Harry up had cost her the ability to make any noise at all. Madam Pomfrey offered to heal her vocal chords, but the girl who had been closer to Harry... just Harry... than any other living person refused a magical cure.

No cure by magic or muggle means could ever heal her heart.

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Being a rescued hostage meant that she was perfectly placed on the water's edge to see Headmaster Dumbledore and Headmistress Maxime work frantically on both students dozens of meters off shore. She assumed Harry had recovered quickly when Dumbledore turned from her friend to charm the boat into motion and assist Madam Maxime. So Harry just took a spear in the chest. Muggles survive similar accidents all the time. Harry will spend a week in the infirmary and be done with it. Right?

From that distance, no-one could see Albus Dumbledore lose the twinkle in his eyes, nor could they hear his ragged breathing as the young man who meant so much to him lay still and lifeless.

Short seconds after the boat began to head to shore several people in the crowd applauded when they saw the little French girl sit up between the two school heads. Hermione smiled at the thought of pulling out her secret 'Lives Saved' scoreboard and adding to Harry's tally. He just got one more devoted fan-girl to add to his collection. She pulled a few loose brown strands of hair back behind her ear and re-adjusted her charms text while waiting for the girl to lean over and give Harry a kiss or a hug or something.

Somehow Hermione seemed to ignore the bright red circular stain in the center of the girl's silk dress. Lines of red and pink marred the once pristine white gown where fresh blood was collecting and where the lake had washed earlier blood-loss away.

The festive atmosphere encouraged by beautiful sunny weather and previous successful rescues was shattered by a horrible wail. Fleur's hostage screamed and threw herself at Harry's form before the two adults in the boat could stop her.

Hermione stood frozen. Crowd and judges alike waited in silence as Madam Pomfrey hopped onto a broom and raced out to the boat while it was still halfway out. Everyone watched helplessly as Madam Maxime held the clawing and wailing little girl down so that both the Headmaster and Madam Pomfrey could work on her injuries.

"God in Heaven above, don't let me be right this time." Hermione's whispered prayer went unheard by mortal ears and unanswered by the Divine.

It was simple logic really. They weren't treating him even though everyone knew he was just as badly wounded as the girl, if not more so. Why not treat him first if he's worse off? Why cry over him like he was de.. dea... Hermione couldn't bear to finish that line of thought. Harry couldn't be... that. He's the hero. He's the one who saves little girls from trolls and snakes and dementors and mermen.

He's not moving.

Wake up, Harry! Wake up! Please! Hermione couldn't give up hope. Not now. Not after everything they've been through together.

When the boat was less than ten meters from shore, Headmaster Dumbledore turned and transfigured a large tent to cover the landing. Seconds later, the boat and all occupants were hidden from view. All anyone could hear was the sounds of a hysterical eight year old. A moment before silence fell, likely due to a privacy charm of some sort, Hermione and anyone else who spoke French clearly heard the girl say two things.

"Come back!" The girl's voice was beginning to crack and turn hoarse. "Don't leave me here alone, Harry! Momma, make Harry come back!"

Hermione couldn't take any more of this. She had to see Harry for herself. If she just got into that tent then she would be able to prove that her ears were lying. She would see Harry tickling the girl as the

adults all stood back and did their eye twinkle thing to each other. She just had to get through the officials who were beginning to surround the tent.

Luckily, officials and security staff in the Wizarding World were fairly inept compared to their muggle counterparts. Hermione put on a mask of indifference and boldly walked straight up to Percy Weasley, who seemed wavering between wanting to enter the tent and wanting to run away.

"I have an important message for the Headmaster from Deputy Headmistress McGonagall. Let me pass." Look him in the eyes. Don't back down. Harry's inside that tent!

Percy nodded and stepped aside. Hermione slipped through the tent flaps and froze. Madam Maxime and Madam Pomfrey were working feverishly over the silver-blond eight year old. Hermione didn't notice. Headmaster Dumbledore told her to leave, that she wasn't allowed in the tent. She couldn't care less.

Harry was in front of her. He seemed relaxed... sleeping even. But then his skin color was a bit off and she couldn't see his chest rise or fall. Oh God, his chest. Hermione batted someone's hand off her shoulder as she stared at the blood soaked break in his robes and the cross-cut pattern carved into his skin from the merman's spear. Hermione saw Harry move away – wait, she was being pulled away. No!

Outside the tent, the worried students, guests and officials heard a new voice cry out from the tent. Hermione's screams and wails weren't quite as high pitched as the little veela girl, but they were louder and carried further.

Inside the tent, Hermione broke free of whoever was keeping her from Harry and ran to the side of the table he lay atop. Planting a palm on the table on either side of his head, she briefly wondered just how she was supposed to save him this time. 'There's a prince in front of me. He must be in an enchanted sleep or something. Kiss him!'

Hermione dipped in for her rescue kiss. Half way down to her goal, a red jet of light caught the panicking Gryffindor between her shoulder

blades. As darkness claimed the poor girl, she raged against the fact that she was only now going to sleep instead of waking up.

Hermione collapsed like a rag doll, their lips joining for the briefest of moments in what may go down in history as Harry Potter's first and only kiss on the lips.

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Le Mystique

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TRIWIZARD TRAGEDY

Harry James Potter is dead. The young boy famous for defeating Dark Lord Voldemort in England on Halloween Night, 1981 lost his life in the Second Task of the Triwizard Tournament which is being hosted by Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry in Scotland. Witnesses claim that the four Champions in this scandal ridden Tournament were tasked to retrieve hostages from the depths of Black Lake on Hogwarts Grounds.

Monsieur Alain Algernon Delacour, father of Beauxbatons Champion Fleur Delacour (17) and her sister/hostage Gabrielle (8), is officially protesting the Second Task and English Headmaster Dumbledore for failing to ensure the safety of students from all three schools during the Tournament. The Delacour girls are of Veela decent, something Headmaster Dumbledore ignored when designing a task which would involve Mermen, beasts who are well known to have a violent history with many European Veela tribes.

While many have protested Mister Potter's (14) position as Fourth Champion since Halloween, his personal actions are beyond reproach. When the four Champions went underwater yesterday to retrieve 'something they would sorely miss' Miss Delacour was singled out by underwater denizens of Black Lake who were unwilling to release Gabrielle. While experts debate Headmaster Dumbledore's relationship with the Merpeople, none can deny that the creatures were angered to violence when Mister Potter chose to rescue not only his own hostage, Ronald Weasley (14), but Gabrielle as well.

Mister Potter sought to shield the smaller girl from attack by shielding her with his own body. With the entire Championship crowd watching from shore, a merman impaled both children on one spear. It is unclear if Dumbledore would have intervened at all were it not for Headmistress Maxime's personal actions to rescue the mortally wounded children. Witnesses at first began to applaud Mister Potter's health when both school figureheads ignored him to heal Gabrielle. It is now clear that Mister Potter was already dead.

This year's Triwizard Tournament was promoted as being a way to unite the three oldest schools of magic in the Wizarding World in a Celebration of skill, natural ability and courage. It was promoted as being different from tournaments in the past where contestants routinely died during the competition. Many began to question the tournament organizers and officials as soon as Harry Potter's name left the Goblet of Fire. Protests lessened when Mister Potter flew his way past a Hungarian Horntail to prove that he did in fact have natural ability and courage enough to complete the First Task with strong marks. Perhaps with his death, Harry Potter can prove to everyone that life is too precious to waste in such competitions.

Do not doubt that this year's tournament will continue, though some believe it shouldn't. In the days and weeks to come, we will do our best to cover international reactions to this tragedy. Readers, The Mystic urges you to write in to our Paris Office and give us your views on the Triwizard Championship and whether or not it should be continued in future years.

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Hermione Jane Granger stood over Harry Potter's open grave overlooking the shores of Black Lake with Hogwarts Castle visible on the far bank. Her black dress robes and black veil made Hermione into the perfect image of a young widow. Never mind that she had never given Harry more than a light peck on the cheek. No girl in Hogwarts was closer to Harry than she was.

Albus Dumbledore had insisted quite vigorously that Hermione be given the honor of tossing the first handful of dirt onto Harry's casket. He had to as a certain Slytherin rival of Harry's had been lobbying for the honor. Minister Fudge was suitably bribed by the boy's influential father and the fresh dragon dung was ready to be delivered. Dumbledore politely refused Minister Fudge's request at

least three times before young Draco removed himself from contention.

Draco was sent to Saint Mungo's Thursday afternoon after a series of rather inappropriate comments made in the middle of a somber lunch was met with a hail of spellfire from three separate student tables. Other members of Slytherin House remained quiet. For the first time in ten years the other three Houses were willing to defy Severus Snape and get revenge for any cut or slight that the 'dark' House attempted.

One handful of dirt had never felt so heavy to Hermione. In a cracked and broken voice, Hermione risked her strained vocal chords so that Harry would know that she was there.

"Who's going to flick bogeys into Ron's food when he's not paying attention if you don't, Harry?" She tried to smile at her own joke, but it came out as more of a facial tick that quickly faded. With a final push, she whispered, "We c-could have had something wonderful Harry. I I-love you."

With the very last remaining courage the once proud Gryffindor could muster, Hermoine released the dirt over Harry's coffin. In a daze, the very closest friend of the Boy-Who-Died was gently guided away by her mother so that the Delacour girls could pay their respects. Behind her, Hermione heard the now common cries of Gabrielle Delacour as she and her sister released the second and third handfuls of dirt that would later that day support a smooth black stone memorial. She wondered why Harry wasn't being interred with his own family. Surely the Potter's have a family cemetery or a family plot at some church or other.

Hermione looked around at the chosen burial site. As she glanced around, several similarities between his life and his afterlife came to mind. He was being isolated again. Harry was not with his mother and father. He was trapped. Hermione knew that Harry looked at his Uncle's house as though it were a prison even if he never admitted it openly. She was beginning to see that Hogwarts may have been another prison for her close friend. He had to sneak out when others could easily provide a signed permission slip for Hogsmeade Weekends or other private family functions. In death, Harry would forever be within the Headmaster's reach. Any student would be

able to honor his grave... or desecrate it. Never again would non-magical Britain feel his presence.

Hermione's thoughts were interrupted by a boy who hardly meant anything to her anymore.

"You beat a bloody dragon! Get up you prat!" Ron was grabbed roughly and hauled off by Fred and George. Ron wasn't the same either. His jealousy had been drowned in a sea of guilt for not swimming to shore faster. Still, he had nothing on the 'bushy-haired know-it-all'.

If only she had taught him more about water related charms. If only she had given him lessons on the Veela – Merman conflicts which pepper magical history just like the Goblin Wars do. If only she'd kissed him before he died.

Were it not for her parents, Hermione may have already done something rash to make sure Harry had company. They wouldn't bury her next to him though, would they?

At least her dreams were pleasant now. In the Land of Nod, Harry was there to give her a hand up or go for walks along the Thames or to take trips to the Library. In her dreams, he always smiled. There was another common theme in her dreams she couldn't properly explain. Gabrielle Delacour was always there. The little Veela would be a few paces behind or a few bookracks over, but she was always in sight. At least the girl is always happy. She really should wipe her forehead though. She's got some strawberry preserves or something up there.

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"What about her?"

Your friend doesn't want to go at first, but he's quickly convinced and the two of you sneak by students and professors alike looking for her.

You don't like the looks of that one Professor and you wonder why he's on the wrong floor. Enough of that, she's in danger.

Your first sign of danger was a horrible smell. That's one load of wash you don't want any part of. The sound comes next, a low grunt and a shuffle.

You and your friend enter the shadows to get some manner of cover from the massive thing which seems to just barely fit in the school halls. It had a club. You really don't want to have to dodge that as the club's easily bigger than you are.

Locking it into the first room it enters sounds like a good idea. Ha! Gotcha! Victory was almost in your grasp when you hear the high pitched scream of a terrified little girl.

"Hermione!" Both of you yell out at the same time.

As hard as it is to unlock that door and run into a room with a troll in it, you can't leave her in there with that. Save her!

The poor girl was pulling herself into a terrified ball as the troll closed in on her, knocking sinks off of the wall just because it could.

Your redheaded friend gets the troll's attention as you run around to the girl and try to get her moving again. Time runs out as the troll starts to go after the other boy. With a silent prayer you do the first thing that comes to mind – jump on it's back and ram your wand up it's nose.

The redhead remembers that he has a wand too. Better yet, he uses it to cast a spell. Lucky shot, mate!

You didn't even consider using that giant club against it's wielder.

She speaks up, "Is it – dead?"

"I don't think so," you reply, "I think it's just been knocked out."

You dig your wand back out of the troll's nose. Disgusting!

"Urgh – troll boogers." You try to get them off of your wand by rubbing it on the troll's trousers, but it's slow going.

"Mommy!" Gabrielle sat up in bed. Her eyes were still closed.

Apolline Delacour pulled herself up next to her daughter. Gabrielle wouldn't sleep alone now, not after the Second Task. "What is it, Angel? Mother is here for you."

Without turning or opening her eyes, Gabrielle held out an invisible wand.

"My wand is covered in troll boogers, Momma. Please clean them off."

Apolline took the imaginary wand from her daughter's hand and slowly pulled the girl back down into bed.

"It's okay, Angel. Momma will have it all clean by morning. Go back to sleep, Gabrielle." Her mother kissed Gabrielle's forehead right over her new blemish. It was an odd little mark that almost looked like a kiss slightly off center to the right. The family healer hasn't been able to do anything to the mark yet. Perhaps time will wash it away.

Apolline returned to sleep with a girl who was never really awake to begin with.

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Hermione opened her eyes. Odd. Why would she dream about the troll now? It's been years since she had that dream.

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Morning came. March 1st would be the first day of classes since the tragic Second Task and Hermione tried to pull herself together before heading down to breakfast. The other girls in her dormitory waited in the wings, Hermione was sure to need a shoulder to cry on. Right? Without comment, she moved into the bathroom to prepare for the day.

Twenty minutes later, the mirror challenged Hermione in an effort to finish their private argument.

"If you're going to act like a grieving widow today, dress like one!" In any other situation, the muggleborn witch would have felt humiliated

at losing an argument with a mirror of all things. Instead she pulled out her wand and got to work.

The other students would go silent as Hermione passed. She was wearing her school uniform as usual but for one change. She had charmed everything black. Black shirt, tie, skirt ... everything was black. Even her earrings were matte black rather than the polished gold they normally were. Poor girl, everyone knew she was close to Potter, but Hermione is acting like they were married or something.

Returning to the Great Hall allowed her to feel hidden in the crowd for a little while. True, her black outfit today was different, but she didn't have the pull Harry had to get attention. Nobody did. Hermione resolved to eat what she could and be as invisible as possible today.

This was not to be.

As she contemplated the raspberry jam on her toast, a single snowy white owl beat the usual morning rush and flew gracefully down the length of Gryffindor's table. Getting mail early wasn't that unusual, but getting Harry Potter's owl to deliver it was.

Hermione hadn't noticed noise levels dropping around her until a lone bark got her attention. Hedwig had landed directly in front of her and was holding out an official looking letter which bore the seal of Gringotts.

"You should open that." These were the first words Ron Weasley had spoken to her since Harry... it's been a few days.

Looking up, she noticed that a quarter of those in the Great Hall were watching her and Hedwig. Hermione didn't like feeling the weight of so many stares.

Neville Longbottom saw the seal on Hedwig's delivery and paled. "You.. you might want to open that now. They can be time sensitive sometimes, bank notices I mean."

Lacking any reason to sneak away, she cracked the wax seal and opened the letter. Hermione carefully read and then re-read the sharp angled letters. 'Immediately', it said. Why not? She slowly pushed her entire plate in front of the snowy white owl and got up.

"So what was it?" Ginny asked her brother moments after Hermione got up and started walking towards the head table. He was very obviously reading over Hermione's shoulder before.

Ron watched for a moment as Hermione walked straight up to the center of the staff table and handed Headmaster Dumbledore the letter. "She's been summoned to Gringotts. Harry's will is being read today and she's mentioned in it."

Ginny looked around the room. "Just her?"

"Yeah. Hedwig's not got another letter and I don't see any other owls, so I guess it's just her." Ginny knew she wasn't really close to the Boy-Who-Li... Harry, but she kinda expected her brother to be called when Hermione was. Weren't they best mates and everything?

Quiet as they had been, their voices still carried enough for other Gryffindors and a Ravenclaw or two to overhear Ron's answer and push the gossip along.

After himself reading the missive twice, Headmaster Dumbledore looked down to Hermione. "I don't recall Harry ever taking the time to write a will. Do you, Miss Granger?"

"No Sir. He never mentioned anything of the sort. That's a Goblin seal though and I don't believe Hedwig would take part in any sort of prank."

"I don't believe she would either." The Headmaster looked somberly down at the letter. "As it so happens, I need to restock my supply of lemon drops. I would be honored if you would permit me to escort you to and from the alley. As Mister Potter's Guardian in the Magical World, they may call upon me in an official capacity."

When the Gryffindor Forth Year student and the School Headmaster left the Great Hall together, noise returned to pre-Second Task levels for the first time. Maybe the student population can begin its journey back to normalcy while the Girl-Who-Grieved was away for an hour or two.

Fleur Delacour gazed through the doors of the Great Hall for a minute or two after losing sight of the Granger girl. She didn't even

realize that one of her classmates had asked her a question until a soft tap on the shoulder registered.

"Yes?"

"She must have loved him dearly, yes? Too dress all in black?" Fleur wasn't the only one watching Miss Granger, then. She nodded quickly. "Maybe they were just too naïve to notice. I never saw the two kissing, but Potter did seem to spend a lot of time with Granger."

"And if the rumors are true? A will reading that she alone in this room received a summons to? Perhaps you are right." Fleur thought about it for a moment before pulling her wand out at the table. As her few close friends watched, the Veela Triwizard Champion began to charm and transfigure all of her jewelry matte black. Fleur wouldn't dare copy the Hermione's transition completely, but she did add some black lacework trim to her uniform fringe.

Fleur looked up to see about half of the Beauxbatons students and a Hogwarts girl or two watching in mild confusion. Well, she supposed her friends did deserve to hear her reasoning.

"Harry Potter was the little boy I took him to be in size only. A 'little boy' would never have come between my sister and a two meter spear. My family owes him much so I will honor him in this way. I can do no less." After a moment of silence, several more Beauxbatons students followed her lead in adjusting their uniforms to honor Harry Potter.

By the end of the day, one third of the student population would be wearing some small black decoration or other that paid respect to the dead Champion.

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Diagon Alley was quiet. Hermione supposed that she and the Headmaster must be coming through when magicals with regular jobs were on the clock. This isn't to say that the alley was empty. On their block, a half dozen or so witches and wizards were going about their business without fuss.

Hermione fought back the desire to study her environment. One day she would return and learn all there was to learn about the world she

had unwittingly stepped into on her eleventh birthday. Today, however, there was business to be done.

Her stomach was beginning to stir up trouble as the imposing facade of Gringotts revealed itself in the distance. Hermione looked to the Headmaster for some reassurance that this would all turn out well, only to find that he was not there. Her stomach troubles spiked and she twirled around to look for the one crutch she had left.

Thank God. He was merely walking slower than Hermione was. Perhaps she should allow the Headmaster to lead the way?

Was Albus Dumbledore really so important to her?

Outside of Hogwarts Castle, away from the constant reminders of the boy who had meant so much to her, Hermione began to review her life in a way she really hadn't attempted to since that first Owl Post shattered her worldview.

Albus Dumbledore was the Headmaster of her school, a British magical living legend as well as a very important figure in Wizarding politics. But what was he to her? He was order. He was a role model... except that now maybe he wasn't one as much as he used to be.

Albus, as Headmaster of Hogwarts, host of the Triwizard Championship, was responsible for the safety of his students and guests of the school. A short mental review of her last four years of life gave Hermione a very negative opinion of just how well he would score on a mug-er, non-magical annual review in that category. Was that normal here in the Wizarding World? How many Hogwarts student's find themselves near death during a typical Hogwarts term? How often is half of the third floor forbidden on pain of death?

She had known the definition of disillusionment for quite some time. Today, Hermione Granger truly understood what the word meant.

-o\O/o-

The Goblins were as gruff as ever. Powerful as Albus Dumbledore was, Hermione could tell that the polite wording the teller and then floor manager used was forced. Of course, considering her own treatment by those well entrenched in magical society, she should

have seen the closed-mindedness and prejudice of Magical Britain long before today.

Draco Malfoy was a racial supremacist if ever there was one. Ron Weasley wasn't as bad, but he wasn't good either. To this day, Ron still treats Hermione and the other muggleborns as if their upbringing is an oddity. His favorite comics focus on the idiocy of a 'mad muggle'. Without Harry Potter to tie Hermione and Ron together, they have no common ground apart from being Gryffindors. Honestly, Hermione would have never been in danger of being flattened by a troll if it weren't for that damn ginger.

Hermione mentally berated herself for using a slur in her own internal rantings. Irony, much?

Was the rest of the Wizarding World just as bad as the closed off society of Wizarding Britain?

Maybe not.

Look at Beauxbatons. The Headmistress is a half-Giantess. Their star pupil has Veela ancestry. Hermione had some studying to do.

Her internal monologue was abruptly cut off when a Goblin waiting in front of some rather nice carved doors chose to interrupt.

"Miss Granger. We did not say that you could bring any guests with you." She blushed. What was she going to say: It wasn't my fault? I can't tell Albus Dumbledore where to go and when to stay away?

"As the Magical Guardian to all orphans and muggleborn students at Hogwarts, I am attending in an official capacity. Please let us through." The Headmaster maintained his 'kind grandfather' look while staring down the Goblin before him.

Hermione's eyes were wide in shock. Really though, she shouldn't have been surprised. Upon review... yes, she did remember seeing that detail in *Hogwarts: A History*. But to realize that the man had legal authority over her which could probably negate her own parent's wishes in the Magical World... Hermione was suddenly very thankful that the Goblins ran the bank independent from Wizarding oversight.

"You were not mentioned in the will. You will not enter." The Goblin turned to the lone child in the hall. "Miss Granger, enter the room."

Not one to question orders, Hermione began to move. A hand came down on her shoulder.

"As the Chief Warlock of the Wizengamot, I declare this Will sealed." Hermione's heart was racing. Any minute now, she expected to see wand and steel drawn and she would get to see Harry again.

"You are too late, Wizard." Hermione had never heard the word 'wizard' used as an insult before. "This Will was acted upon the moment Harry Potter's heart stopped. You never did 'find' his parents' wills for us, did you? Wait for her outside, Mister Dumbledore."

For a moment, his hand stayed where it was. What did he hope to gain? Not enough, apparently. The Headmaster took a deep breath and lifted his hand off of Hermione's shoulder. She looked up into his eyes.

"I hope you can forgive an old man his transgressions, Miss Granger. We have both lost much, and I am caught trying to save what little I can." Headmaster Dumbledore looked ahead as if he could see through those heavy decorative doors to the Will inside. "It's nineteen eighty-one all over again. Perhaps I should tread more carefully this time."

As the Headmaster turned to leave, Hermione called out, "Will you be waiting outside, Headmaster Dumbledore?"

He looked to her once more. "Perhaps we can meet at Florean Fortescue's for some ice cream, my dear. I daresay we will both need a bit of fresh air and some sugary treats after this morning's business is complete. After I acquire some more lemon drops of course... can't forget about those."

She almost smiled. Harry would have smiled.

"It's about bloody time." The Goblin must have been on his last frayed nerve. He opened doors before her and showed Hermione swiftly to a single seat on one side of a heavy oak table. Two

Goblins were already sitting opposite her with scrolls and ledgers open.

"Right. You are Miss Hermione Granger, are you not?" The more smartly dressed of the two Goblins began without even looking at her. Why would he need to though, she was the only one invited.

"I am, Sir." The second sitting Goblin seemed to nod and grunt towards his parchments.

"The wards agree. Very well." He looked up for the first time. Hermione was struck with the idea that this Goblin more closely resembled Professor Flitwick than the others she'd passed today. Perhaps they were related.

"I have here the Will of Harry Potter, written and sent to us on the twenty-third day of November, 1994. As you are the only one mentioned in the will, we will dispense with the pageantry of a public reading. Mr. Potter wrote the entire document as if it was a letter to you, Miss Granger, therefore you have the option to read it yourself or have me read it to you." Her eyes were getting moist the moment he said 'Harry'. Her first tear hit the table surface as soon as she heard how Harry wrote it.

She held out a shaking hand and nodded, not trusting herself to speak. In her own head, Harry could read it to her himself.

November 23rd, 1994

This is the Last Will and Testament of Harry Potter.

Hermione,

If you are reading this parchment, then I must be dead. Considering what I must do tomorrow, I am probably a pile of dragon shite at whatever time you end up reading this.

If I am a pile of dragon shite, then I beg you to get that pile to the twins so that they can find a way to get all of Hogwarts to eat me during breakfast.

Please, please, please laugh at my joke, Hermione.

Now for the real will.

I find myself writing this and wondering why God hates me. I only know of one person who is willing to support me. One person smart enough to see that I couldn't have put my name in that damn goblet and that same person is the only one who has always been there for me.

You.

You never lost faith in me, Hermione. You kept me alive when we were Ickle Firsties. You figured out the Basilisk for me in second year. You traveled through time to help me save my Godfather and stop a noble creature from being butchered. You reported the Firebolt for me, I understand that now. You alone helped me train for this championship.

I'll not suffer fair weather friends in death and I ask that you reject them in life.

Now that I find myself with what may be less than twenty-four hours to live, I see what you mean to me. Hermione, you are the only living person in my heart. There's Mum and Dad and you and that's it. I'm not saying that we would've, like, gotten married or anything, but maybe. I don't know. Big sister would have worked too.

So, as you are either the sister I never had or the wife I never married, I hereby give you all that I own, whatever that happens to be. If I can give it to you, then it's yours.

Well, there's only one thing left to say that I've never said before in my life. I really hope that I can get the chance to do so face to face before some damn dragon snaps my spine like a sugar quill.

If I don't ever see you again,

I Love You

Harry Potter

Hermione couldn't laugh. She couldn't cry. She couldn't breathe. Luckily, Goblins were used to this kind of reaction and had spells ready to catch her as Hermione's vision faded.

-o\O/o-

Twenty minutes later, Hermione came to in a small sitting room of some sort. In the back of her mind, she realized that she had just properly used the one piece of furniture that was completely obsolete in non-magical England; a fainting chair. While she tried to sit up and take stock of herself, she heard something hit the floor by her feet.

Glancing down, there was a small ledger book with a key tied to the face and a certified copy of the Will. She picked up the parchment and the ledger and looked around. As her feet hit the floor for the first time, a door off to her right opened slightly allowing her to hear some random discussions in voices too low to make the details out. Magic, no doubt.

This must be how the Goblins ask grieving widows and other family to leave without being there in person. On reflection, Hermione approved. A sour Goblin frown was not very supportive to the bereaved. She stopped by a small mirror and make-up stand by the door and cleaned herself up a bit.

-o\O/o-

"Oh, you poor dear. You look miserable." Hermione looked up from her ice cream to see who had addressed her.

-click-

"Miss Skeeter. I wish I could say that I am pleased to meet you, but now is not a good time." The Headmaster sighed and looked as though he were disappointed at his former pupil.

"Our beloved Headmaster and a young witch sharing ice cream together when they both ought to be in school? How scandalous!" Rita, opportunist that she was, pulled up a chair and sat down uninvited at their table. As soon as she sat down, she placed a clean sheet of parchment on the table and held a quill above it. When she let go of the quill, it began scratching furiously on the parchment below without her hand so much as getting in the way.

"We are here on business, Miss Skeeter. My student was summoned from school to attend to private matters and I saw fit to escort her." If Dumbledore were vague enough, perhaps the drivel Rita Skeeter came up with would be ignored. Her stories always need a fact or two in them to keep the rest of the manure believable.

"But she looks so sad, Headmaster." Rita looked into Hermione's eyes with as soft and inviting a face as she could muster on short notice. "Perhaps a little witch talk would do you some good. Whatever it is, dear, I've been there already. What do you say?"

Rita moved her hand to cover Hermione's causing the bushy haired witch to shrink back into her chair. Rita's hand briefly paused over the folded parchment sitting atop Hermione's new ledger, but she pulled back when then Headmaster sat up a little straighter.

"We really must be getting back to Hogwarts. Come along Miss Granger, I believe that Miss Skeeter has what she came for." The old Headmaster rose from the table and helped Hermione from her chair. He briefly sighed in disappointment when looking over to Rita's clasped hands and her still active quill.

-o\0/o-

The next morning, Hermione walked into the Great Hall to the excited whispers of the entire student body. While confused, she tried to ignore them all. Harry was a good role model in that respect.

Her ability to block it all out was shattered when Neville, who she sat down next to, slowly pushed a copy of the morning paper in front of her. Right on the front cover was a picture of herself and the Headmaster. The picture showed Hermione acting the part of a grieving widow from her sad broken face to the all black clothing. But that wasn't enough apparently.

Somehow that bitch Skeeter must have made a copy of the will.

Hermione didn't even bother reading past the headlines when she recognized the handwriting so accurately depicted. She didn't care that there were two articles focusing on her relationship with Harry and two more which speculated wildly on the possible meanings of every word and phrase Harry wrote. An 'expert' even tried to analyze

which of the nine visible tear stains were likely Harry's and which were Hermione's.

Hermione could have told them if she had ever bothered to read the paper. The original and certified copies were charmed to repel staining. All tear stains were faked by Skeeter to build up drama.

Ginny took the initiative and pulled Hermione up from the table. Lavender and Parvati quickly stepped in when Ginny almost lost her grip on the older Gryffindor and three witches gently guided her back up to the Gryffindor fourth year girl's dorm where she would spend most of the day.

Back in the Great Hall, a new nickname for Hermione was beginning to make the rounds.

Mrs. Potter.

-o\0/o-

31 march 1995

Dearest Mother,

I am well. The food here continues to insult my palette, but I will not die from it.

How is Gabrielle coping? You write about her dreams, but you give no details. Mother, do not tease. My imagination is full of horrid nightmares where those thrice damned mermen torment my Little Gabby and make her witness Harry's death again. Is she returning to her lessons? And what of her friends? I know what little girls are like and Gabby will be going back to class with that mark on her head.

Life begins to return to Hogwarts Castle, I think. I admit that we and the Durmstrang students were better able to move past Harry Potter's death even honoring him as we do, but I sometimes have to remember how important he was to our hosts. These English wizards show no sense of decency, Mother. At least once a day, a student from Slytherin House or perhaps Ravenclaw insults the deceased. Why the Professors tolerate this behavior, I have no idea. Is it any wonder when revenge is had by Potter's supporters? Yet

again the students get away with so much that would have them suspended or even expelled from Beauxbatons.

I feel bad for Miss Granger, Mother. You can comfort Gabrielle and I can write her letters, but Hermione is alone in Hogwarts. I and my friends do not see her talking to other students. It is rumored that Harry was the leader of her clique and that the small group is broken without him. If anything, those articles about Hermione and Harry understate how important Harry was to the girl. I think I will approach Hermione and ask her to write to Gabrielle.

Please bring Gabrielle with you when you visit for the Third Task. I miss you all terribly.

Your Loving Daughter,

Fleur

-o\0/o-

"Excuse me, Fleur?"

"Oui, Cedric?" Fleur looked up from her studies to find the other two Champions standing together behind her. Apparently her classmates had noticed the serious look both boys had adopted and were clearing the table.

"Could Victor and I have a moment of your time?" Cedric took note of the half-dozen girls who were picking up books and parchments, clearly intending to leave the table. "I don't wish to disturb you. If you would rather we talk at a later date..."

"No need to apologize, Mister Diggory. We were just leaving." The curly haired brunet who addressed Cedric looked over to Fleur. "Both of them? Try to leave something for the rest of us, Fleur. We like quidditch players too."

"I don't know what you mean." Fleur held up her nose in mock insult.

"Whore." The brunet was smirking.

"Slut." That's what good friends are for. Fleur was smiling for the first time in days.

As the other Beauxbatons girls left the Library table to take their studies elsewhere, both Cedric and Victor sat across the table from the female Champion. Cedric briefly scanned the room, taking note of several students which seemed to be interested in the unusual meeting of three school champions. Doing this in the middle of the library is sure to start rumors, but these would be much better than the rumors they'd get for sneaking off to meet in an empty classroom.

"Well, Fleur... Victor... thank you both for agreeing to meet with me." Cedric looked at each of the other Champions in turn. "I asked the two of you to meet with me because what happened to Harry is really getting to me recently."

"You suspect we will have trouble in Third Task?" Victor continued to look off at some distant point. The boy had yet to meet Cedric's gaze directly. Still, he was paying attention.

"Yes. I know Harry was just fourteen and in his fourth year. He hadn't even taken the O.W.L.'s yet. But he did great in the First Task and in the Second... well... he was doing so well until they followed him up to the surface." The three of them paused in mutual respect for a fallen Champion.

"Is true. I would not have done better taking two hostages. Spear went well on visard and shark." Victor looked down at the table.

"That merman would have killed me too. I didn't have any idea that they'd be so violent to you or your sister, Fleur. I'm sorry for not knowing." Cedric felt real guilt. He had asked around and found that no-one he knew in Hogwarts had any idea that there was bad blood between the Veela and the Merpeople. History of Magic and the Care of Magical Creatures classes clearly weren't doing their jobs to miss something like that.

"If Headmaster Dumbledore had just told Madam Maxime what was under the lake, she could have told him the big mistake. Do not blame yourself." Cedric sighed and nodded in thanks. The guilt wouldn't go away so easily though.

"Never the less. Both tasks so far were far deadlier than I had been told to expect. The Daily Prophet ran articles devoted to the safety

measures in place to keep us alive. Now I find myself unable to trust the Headmaster to ensure my safety. I need to see to my own well being."

"So you find us to talk togezer without ze 'eadmasters separating us. You wish to train togezer, no?" Fleur had been having similar thoughts recently. Albus Dumbledore has been spending a lot of time outside of the castle defending his actions and defending his long time allies, the merpeople. To date, four merpeople had been found dead near known merman colonies in the UK. All showed signs of meeting violent ends.

"Yes. We need to watch each other's backs. I'm fine sharing the win or giving it up if that's the only way to ensure that we all walk away in the end." The other two Champions nodded.

"I volunteer vatch Veela back. Is better back to vatch." Krum wasn't smiling, but his face had changed to be slightly less harsh. Was he joking?

"I don't blame you." Cedric grinned as Fleur fought back a blush. "Speaking of... Is your allure something you can reduce or turn off for a bit? I'd rather see the deadly beasts approaching than die staring at your arse, Fleur."

"Oui. I can reduce it enough so zat you do not notice. Next, let us talk of a practice schedule and where to practice..."

The three Champions spent over an hour together in the Library. For the first night in weeks, Harry and Hermione were not the biggest rumor topics at dinner in the Great Hall.

-o\0/o-

"Granger."

Hermione froze, a fork covered in pork hovering near her open mouth. Discreetly, several Gryffindors at the table palmed their wands. It had been a long time since Draco had spoken directly to Hermione or Ron, a sure sign that he was about to make up for the lack of harassment by overdoing it.

"I see what hangs about your neck. Dirty as Scarhead was, he was still the heir of an old pureblood family. Had he married well, his children could still have been accepted in proper society." Hermione placed her left hand over her chest, covering the item hidden beneath her cloak. She didn't think anyone would notice that she had tied Harry's wand to a chain and started wearing it as a necklace once or twice a week.

"A mudblood like you has no business inheriting the legacy of a Noble House." Draco frowned. She had not turned around to address him yet. "As I am a relative, however distant, to Potter through the Blacks, I demand that you hand over all Potter assets. We'll start with the wand."

"You forget, Malfoy, that my family is about as close to the Potter line as yours. I also know that we are both far too distant in blood to have any claim on HER THINGS. Potter was clear in his Will. Go. Away." Ron's wand wasn't out, but he was close enough not to need one.

"Potty's gone, Weasel. Though, I should have known you'd still side with Granger. Ah! I understand! All you have to do is get this bitch to spread her legs and the Potter gold is as good as-"

Ron's fist slammed into Draco's chin. As the blonde spun around, Ginny reared back and drove her foot into the Malfoy family jewels with enough force to crack diamonds.

Crabbe and Goyle stepped forward to get some revenge and chaos erupted along the Gryffindor table.

-o\0/o-

"Gigi! Aimee!" Gabrielle ran to her classmates. She hadn't attended class since before visiting her sister in Scotland.

"Gabby!" The girls were quite excited to see her. Gabrielle was always a good friend before, but now she was their famous good friend. Still, what good was a famous good friend if she never came to school?

Unlike their British counterparts, the French Ministry of Magic chose to follow many trends established by their non-magical neighbors in

the last two hundred years. One result is formal education for magical students as early as age three. Granted, French children do not get their own wands until about the same time as their English counterparts. No-one wants to see a childish tantrum multiplied by spellfire. This is not to say that these young witches and wizards only learn magical material, far from it. Non-magical history, arts, maths and sciences were covered as well. While the French Revolution did not significantly damage rich magical families in France, these lucky pockets of nobility watched their non-magical counterparts learn a terminal lesson. Common men are not helpless.

"What's that on your head?" Seems like an innocent enough question... if you're not a little girl surrounded by status obsessed little girls. Gigi didn't mean anything by it. Not that the secret would have been kept for long but did she have to blurt it out so loud?

Several groups of girls and boys stopped devouring their lunches to watch the Girl-Who-Lived come back to school after her disastrous trip to Hogwarts.

"Wow! You really did steal Harry Potter's scar!" A largish boy near the back yelled out. Gabrielle and her friends turned to the brute.

"Did not! Gabby wouldn't do that, she liked him. She liked him liked him. You don't go stealing scars off people you like like." Gabby was glad to have friends that will always take her side, but that defence was making her blush. Blushing only made the mark stand out more. Well that's new; her mark is tickling some.

"So, Girl-Who-Lived. How DID you get your scar?" A lot of boys and girls were now glaring at the troublemaker. This didn't change the fact that they wanted to know the answer to his question. Professor Royal, at the opposite end of the room, was watching closely for a good excuse to step in.

"He... umn... kindof... kissedmewhenwewereunderwater... thenhedied..." Head down, Gabrielle mumbled out the answer so that only a few near the front of the classroom could hear.

"He kissed you?" Aimee forgot the whole 'thenhedied' bit for a moment. A famous fourteen year old boy kissed Gabby. "Wow- but, kisses don't stain. Do they?"

"Magic kisses do! They save lives too. Those grown-ups didn't save me, Harry did! He saved me RIGHT HERE!" Gabrielle ended her point by poking herself in the forehead. She would never need a mirror to point to her mark. She could feel it. She could always feel it.

It started small but quickly grew. What began as a child's story became rumor and then official research. It would take time to find it's way back to England, but the legend of Potter's Mark was born.

End Chapter

Chapter Two: United We Stand

May 29th, 1995

Victor dove out of the sun, nearly taking Cedric's head off with a high speed pass a hundred meters or so above the highest tower of Hogwarts Castle.

The message was clear: Tag, you're it.

As the French Triwizard Champion looked up at the two wizards, she admired the interaction between two seekers who were seeking each other in turn. She realized early on that Victor had to hold back on occasion or Cedric would never manage a tag.

"Why aren't you up there with them? Isn't this part of your training?" Hermione had walked up behind Fleur as the statuesque Veela posed atop her own broom and floated along at head height.

"Zey are boz seekers. I like to fly, but my broom is not for competing. Zis one is more for comfort." The two witches looked on as Victor began to lead Cedric down an invisible slalom course between castle towers.

"Would... would it help you train if you had a better broom?"

"Oui. I should say, it would if I use ze better broom in ze Final Task. Zere is no way to tell what skill is needed and what is a waste, so we train some in all zings." Fleur turned to the younger witch to see Hermione studying the broom she was resting on.

"I didn't know that they had ones made for comfort. I have a broom; Harry's broom. It's important to me, but I think he would have wanted to see it used." Hermione looked back up to the two figures darting about over the battlements.

"I've never tried it myself, mind you, so I don't know how comfortable it is, but it's supposed to be the best broom in Hogwarts except maybe for what Victor's on."

"It is... what was ze name again... a Firebolt, no?" Fleur was surprised. This must be the broom Harry used to get past the dragon. Why would Hermione make such an offer? "I zink zat broom would

get me up zer with zem. If you would allow me to use 'arry's broom for ze rest of ze year, I could teach you 'ow to use zis one. She is a good broom for relaxing in ze air. Zen we get you a broom which suits you during ze summer."

"Oh, I don't know. I mean, I've never liked flying on brooms. I thought I would die during my First Year flying lessons. Never went up again." Hermione was actually quite disappointed with that part of her education. She was a witch, was she not? All muggles knew witches flew on brooms. It's one of the things her parents were hoping to get to see once Hermione was legal to perform spell-work at home.

"ermione, I 'ave seen ze brooms 'ogwarts teaches on and I would not touch zem wiz ze blasting curse. At Beauxbatons, we use good, safe brooms which do much of ze work for you. 'ere, zey teach you all on flying firewood. 'ow disgraceful." Fleur saw something in Hermione's eyes. Hope? Whatever it was, it was more positive than anything she had seen from the girl since Harry's death. "Did 'arry ever offer to take you up?"

"Y-yes, a few times. I just couldn't do it. We did go flying together once though. It was on the back of a Hippogriff. That was... well, it was nice." Her ever present heartache was pushed aside in favor of the warm feelings that night still generated. Hermione never realized how romantic riding Buckbeack with her arms around Harry had been until now.

Hermione wanted to have more in common with Harry, more to remember him by. Learning to fly a broom, eventually flying his own Firebolt, would really impress him. Well, it would if he could see her doing it.

"I'll go get the Firebolt. But... it's way up in Gryffindor tower. You may not get your chance to use it today."

"op on be'ind me." Fleur scooted forward and then patted the broom shaft behind her. Hermione hesitated.

"Your room 'as a window, yes?" Hermione nodded. "Zen we shall fly to it! My broom may not be for racing, but she can fly well enough for zis."

Hermione cautiously mounted Fleur's broom behind the Veela. Her eyebrows rose as she discovered that this broom did indeed feel softer and more stable than the school broom she learned on. But how- wait. Hermione mentally berated herself for forgetting that she didn't need to see the effects of magic to feel them.

Five minutes later, Victor and Cedric were drifting through the shadow of the Astronomy tower when they spotted Hermione gliding up to them on Fleur's broom.

"Hermionie? You like brooms now?" Victor was surprised. She clearly stated her distaste for flying when they were dancing at the Yule Ball.

It was Hermione's turn to be surprised. This was the first time Victor got her name right on the first try.

"I need to learn how to fly. I may not be ready to try Harry's Firebolt today... but one day I will be." She decided to sidestep the issue of broom design for now. It was almost time.

"Well, I'm impressed. I know you've got brains enough for Ravenclaw, but you've also got the loyalty and work ethic of a Badger." Cedric was smiling at her. Perfect, he wasn't looking up.

Vwooosh!

Both seekers yelped and jerked back as a light blue silk clad cannon ball with silver-blond hair shot past them from above and finished her first ever Wronski Feint about twenty meters off the ground.

"Sometimes I think Slytherin would have done much better if he were willing to take ambitious and cunning students regardless of blood purity." With that comment, Hermione followed Fleur down to the courtyard.

"We should punish girls for disprank?" Victor was... well, to be honest, Victor was aroused by the girls' teamwork.

"Let's draw it out some, Vic." Cedric brought his eyes back up to Victor from observing the brown haired witch far below them. "That was the first smile I've seen on Hermione's face in months."

Victor nodded.

The chase was on.

-o\O/o-

"And there he is."

Four students with green and silver ties stopped their lunchtime stroll.

Black Lake was quiet and smooth behind them as they formed a half circle around the smooth black stone memorial on the shore opposite Hogwarts Castle.

"He doesn't look so damned heroic now, does he?" One upper year prefect, the leader of this particular expedition kicked a pebble across the polished surface. One of the girls giggled in support.

"We're here, so now what? You said you would bring some dragon dung with you." The other boy in the group was getting impatient. He was of the opinion that you were supposed to eat lunch during your lunch period, that or do something worth doing.

"Draco begged off. I thought he of all people would have wanted to do this, but..." He looked at the girls behind him. "You two may want to look away if you don't want to see the act... you can't say who did it if you didn't see them doing it, right?"

"This is sick. I'm leaving." The blonde girl turned to step away before a large hand wrapped around her wrist.

"I didn't know you liked Potty, Greengrass. Such bad taste in boys." The prefect spit out.

"I don't like him any more than you do. You just don't disrespect the dead in their graves. Have you no sense of tradition? Of family honor? We're all related to Potter if you look far enough into the past." Daphne Greengrass pulled free and began to walk away.

"I'll be sure to tell Draco you turned on us!" The other girl shot back.

"All you do is choke on his cock all day, Pansy. It's a wonder we ever hear your voice at all."

As Daphne continued back down the lakeside path, the prefect dropped trow and maneuvered himself over Potter's grave. She heard the other boy say something about supervised detention in a broom cupboard but knew they didn't have the political pull to make that work. Not even Draco could force that punishment through. Morgana knows he's tried.

As the Slytherin girl got far enough away not to hear individual words, the prefect started screaming. By the time Daphne turned to see what was wrong, Pansy Parkinson and the other boy had added their screams to his.

A quick spin to the ground was all that kept Daphne from catching a ball of fire in the chest herself. She risked opening her eyes just long enough to see that fireworks were erupting from the ground immediately around Potter's grave in a fountain of fire, light and noise.

"Protego!" Her shield deflected two more pyrotechnic shells before the first professor managed to arrive and begin disabling traps.

Two minutes later, Daphne was suffering the combined glares of Headmaster Dumbledore and her own Head of House, Professor Snape. She didn't hold back, not that she wanted to. Those idiots deserved to suffer for disturbing the dead.

-o\O/o-

Hermione scooped another fork full of scrambled eggs into her mouth. After a brief mental debate, she decided to have a second helping of bacon and sausage for the first time in months. Maybe this breakfast would be her chance to turn a corner and start improving her lot in life.

Today, she was going to go flying with Fleur again. Hermione, gasp, actually looked forward to it.

Hermione owed this change, once again, to a mirror with attitude. 'Any lighter and you're sure to float away' it said. On reflection, she knew that you weren't supposed to be able to see your hip bone so

clearly. Her clothing was hanging loose recently, too. If nothing else, Hermione wanted to at least look normal. And to look like a normal girl – er – witch, she needed a bit more padding around the middle.

Of course, the day Hermione resolves to do something positive in her life is the day another owl lands in front of her during the morning delivery rush. The owl itself is not a particularly noteworthy owl, average in size and coloring and not unlike the hundreds of other owls that make deliveries to Hogwarts.

It took Hermione actually looking over the Ministry of Magic notice for her attempt at a normal breakfast to go right to Hell. Her left hand grabbed desperately at her chest as bits of egg and sausage fell from her open mouth.

The Ministry wanted Harry's wand.

June 4th, 1995

From the Office of the Minister for Magic

Hermione Granger,

It has come to the attention of the Ministry of Magic that you possess Harry Potter's Holly and Phoenix Feather wand. This wand has been declared a historic artifact by order of the Minister for Magic.

You are hereby ordered to release Harry Potter's wand into the protective custody of Minister for Magic Cornelius Fudge or a duly appointed representative of the Minister for Magic.

On June 24th, the day of the Third Task of the Triwizard Tournament, you will have the honor of symbolically relinquishing the wand to Minister Fudge. This will occur during the Final Ceremony and shortly after you make a speech; one which will be provided to you before the ceremony. No deviations from the approved script will be allowed.

Dolores Umbridge

Senior Under-Secretary

to the Minister for Magic

Hermione suppressed the fresh pain that still comes when someone mentions Harry. Anger prevailed. How could they ignore Harry's wishes? How could they take Harry's wand from her? How could they expect her to speak in front of a crowd without knowing what it is they want her to say?

The ministry owl barked at her.

"I don't have a reply. Go back to your owner." While the brown bird was not smart enough to understand what Hermione said, it did leave twenty minutes later after Hermione left the Great Hall and failed to return.

-o\O/o-

Albus fell back into his chair and reached for a lemon drop. Truth be told, he needed something stronger than sugar right now.

Severus Snape and Minerva McGonagall were having a terrible row in the Headmaster's Office. Severus was demanding the Weasley twins be expelled immediately with all house points removed from Gryffindor. Minerva countered that no-one knew who had so heavily protected Harry Potter's burial site. In fact, the only thing that was well documented was the attempt by three of his snakes to desecrate the grave, which was an Official Ministry Historic Marker in case Severus forgot.

Severus of course pointed out that Daphne didn't actually see the desecration. He refused to comment on the fresh pile of fecal matter found on the black stone slab or the amount of burned skin on his young charge's posterior. There was clearly no burnt layers of cloth where a magical mortar shell made contact with his backside. Madam Pomfrey had to re-create half of the boys right buttock. Miss Parkinson was regrowing hair in the Hospital Wing overnight.

"Albus! I'm only going to say this one time..." Minerva looked back to the Headmaster from her last verbal tirade against Snape.

"Four hundred points from Gryffindor." Snape muttered just loud enough to officially count.

"You will reverse that or I shall see every Slytherin student fourth year and above in the school in detention for the rest of the year! I'll oversee them personally!" His comment was too petty to ignore for the proud Scott.

"Minerva, please be reasonable-" But the Headmaster was cut off.

"Reasonable? You let Severus take points for NO REASON without question. You have been sitting there quietly listening as this man insults both Harry and James Potter repeatedly and you say nothing. You who claim to have loved Harry like your own grandson?" The Deputy Headmistress almost couldn't speak, she was so angry.

"I am canceling both punishments as they are both without merit." After a deep breath, Albus looked over to Minerva.

"You may punish the three Slytherins as is appropriate to their crimes. We will all seek to find those who set the surprisingly elaborate defenses around Harry's memorial and they too will be punished as is appropriate to their crimes." Albus looked between his two most important faculty members before settling his gaze once more on the Head of Gryffindor House.

"You must realize, Minerva, that we now have the next generation of dark wizards here as students. They need special handling if we are to have any hope of swaying them to the light." She'd heard this before during less troubling times and it bothered her then too.

"You seek to turn dark wizards light by allowing them to bully and otherwise abuse the rest of the student population? How does that work? I've told you time and time again, Albus, that your plan isn't working. And what of the light wizards of the future? They come out of our school cowed and beaten. We've been teaching them to take the abuse without defending themselves; we've been teaching them that the authority figures won't defend them and in fact will defend their abusers." Minerva pinched the bridge of her nose.

In most cases that's exactly how the Ministry works. Heavy bribes tend to have that effect on public officials.

"I've been blindly supporting you long enough. I've let absurd punishments go unanswered for far too long. Albus, by the end of the year, Severus leaves this school or I will."

Without another word, Minerva McGonagall stormed out of the Headmaster's office. She didn't bother to hide her anger from staff or students that she passed by that evening, either. She really didn't know herself if she would follow through on her threat. She did know that if Snape continued as he normally does with his rewards and punishments then she would balance him point for point and detention for detention.

-o\O/o-

Fire sputtered and flared inside of a sizable fireplace situated in opposite a pair of large doors in the entry foyer to the Delacour family's manor house. Seconds later, a petit form shot out of the flames and bounced along the marble floor.

"Momma! I'm home!" Gabby began to pick herself up, all the time wondering when she forgot how to exit the floo. She was so good at it before... Momma would not be pleased.

"Welcome back my Little Angel. How were your classes today?" Her mother's voice could be heard through an open doorway to the Study.

"I did well again in English today, Mother." Gabby was very proud of her new best subject. She's gotten perfect scores before, but never in her language classes. "Absolon was a pest today, but Gigi kicked him in the shin when Madam Royal was not looking!"

"I am very happy that you have such good friends, Gabby, but you should know that violence isn't the answer." Apolline responded absently with her head still bent over the parchments delivered with today's mail. "You have a visitor."

Gabrielle quickly looked over to the Study's owl stand. Hedwig gave the newcomer a short bark hello and lifted up a letter laden leg. Gabby smiled brightly for the pretty bird and skipped over to take her mail.

"Good afternoon-" Gabby cut herself off and tried again in English. "Good afternoon, Hedwig. Thank you again for spending your spare

time with us but aren't you supposed to be Miss Granger's owl now?"

Hedwig gave a few chirps and barks which may have meant something to other owls. Gabby took the letter from her leg and lightly rubbed Hedwig's back for a moment. Once the novelty of petting Hedwig wore off, she ran over to her father's empty seat and opened her letter.

"It's from Hermione, Momma. She say's 'hi' to everyone and wants to hear about my classes."

"That's right. The dear was quite surprised to find out just how differently we handle education on this side of the Channel. Such a bright girl, I hate to see her potential wasted in a country that will never accept her for what she is." Apolline finished the letter she was working on with a flared signature and a wax family seal.

"Why?"

"The British, Angel. Their witches and wizards are so backwards compared to us or even to their own non-magical neighbors. Hermione's parents are non-magical and many of her peers will hate her for that." She hated taking away her daughter's innocence like this, but the girl had to learn sooner or later. In no time at all, Gabrielle will start growing just as her sister did before her. She will soon learn what it means to lose friends because Veela are different.

At least this time Fleur could help. Perhaps Hermione could too. Apolline made a note to send a book on Veela history and customs to the muggleborn Gryffindor. If she could learn the book's more important lessons then Alain would surely hire her after graduation. Unlike many in the French Ministry of Magic, Apolline's husband was not 'above' hiring English graduates if they showed potential.

"Deeaarr, Her – mi – o – ne." Gabby began her own letter in reply. "I am welllllll. Ab – so – lon was mean to me, but my ver – y best – est friend Gi – gi kicked him. I like her she is a good friend."

Gabrielle continued to say aloud what she was writing. Even with her new found skill with the English language, spelling it all correctly and maintaining her penmanship was hard for the eight year old. Gabby went on to write of learning about the famously scandalous

witch, Joan of Arc. Gabby ignored her boring math lessons in favor of writing about a lesson where they made a simple and yummy calming draught. Madam Royal was going to keep that one for the next time her class got unruly.

"Peeee Eesssss. Why does En-glish food suck so bad?"

"Gabrielle! That is crude and disrespectful!"

"Sorry, Momma." Properly cowed, she ducked her head and added one more line. "Peee Eesssss Eesssss. I am sor – ry for be – ing cruuuude and dis – re – spect – ful. Fleur said it first. Moth – er should scold Fleur first."

-o\O/o-

Draco Malfoy quietly scanned the Great Hall as students continued to eat and talk and otherwise go about their business.

Today, no snakes were talking to Daphne Greengrass. Socially isolated in her own house, the blonde resorted to trading a few bits of gossip with her associates in Ravenclaw. Draco knew that this cold shoulder treatment couldn't last forever, not for a girl as well connected as Greengrass. Still, he could use it to his advantage if he moved quick enough. She was a remarkably attractive witch from a good pureblood house and Draco would be more than happy to help her return to social dominance for the right price.

Across the Hall near the far wall, he spied the three Champions discussing something or other with Granger. They've been doing that a lot recently. Draco had to hand it to the Veela; trading a rather common broom for Potter's Firebolt was a masterstroke.

But enough of that, it was time to continue his father's plan. Draco braced himself, pulled in all of his Slytherin cunning and became the Perfect Bastard everyone now 'knew' him to be.

Crabbe and Goyle followed Draco around the Hall to the mudblood and her Champion friends.

"Cedric, Cedric, Cedric. Really, I can understand why you spend time with the Veela. Who wouldn't? But Granger?"

The first time Draco heard his father's plan, he was horrified. Father actually wanted him to hurl the absolute worst insults he could think of with a Gryffindor-ish disregard for self-preservation. This apparently must be done in public and with some frequency.

"And vat, may I ask, is problem vith Hermione?" He got the Durmstrang Champion mad. Merlin's balls, this was going to hurt.

This was one of many problems Draco had with his father's plan. Draco had to be the most vocal supporter of the dark and of the Dark Lord's social platform. Being so obvious about it would ensure he become a Death Eater youth leader when the Dark Lord returns, as his father assured him would happen soon, and further entrench the Malfoy family as one of the most powerful pureblood lines in English history. Why did Draco think this was a problem? Because Draco had to provoke fights now in order to rule Magical England years later.

"She's worthless. Filth. The Potter gold's been in her control long enough that it must be tainted." Draco estimated that he would be conscious for another eight to twelve seconds.

The worst part, Draco knew, was that his father's plan was absolute shit. Dark Lord's don't let their underlings rule, they do it themselves. The Malfoy heir was shocked one night to hear his drunken father honestly describe how often the Dark Lord tortured his own servants. The good ones, mind you, not the cannon fodder. Draco was certain that his father had more influence in the Ministry today than he ever would when the Dark Lord returned.

'A Malfoy bows to no man.' As often as Lord Malfoy said this in his own home, he was showing himself unable to stand by the maxim.

"Go away! You are not worz 'er time. Begone and take vos voyous wiz you." Fleur was flustered enough not to worry about extra French words here and there.

"Come on Cedric. You're a Champion for Merlin's sake. Put these bitches in their place. The court flower would make a decent mistress and the mudblood, well... I know someone who claims to run a whorehouse just off of Knockturn Alley. Granger may still be worth a few sickles a night due to her age."

Draco would wake up in the Hospital Wing the next morning and write to his father that the plan was being followed. He would then spend the rest of his recovery brainstorming safe ways to derail his father's plan.

Following it hurt like you would not believe.

-o\O/o-

"Ahh, Miss Granger. Please sit down." Albus waited for Hermione to take a seat before seating himself in his chair in the Headmaster's Office. "Care for a lemon drop?"

"No thank you, Sir." She took a breath before diving into her reason for requesting a meeting.

"Thank you for agreeing to meet with me, Headmaster. I know you're a busy man."

"Think nothing of it, Dear. As Headmaster of this school, my primary duty is to see that the needs of the students are being met. That means, Miss Granger, that I am here for you whenever you need me." Albus took a lemon drop for himself. "So, Miss Granger, what is it that I can do for you today?"

"Well, I received this letter from the Minister for Magic's office." Hermione slid the letter over the Headmaster's desk. "It claims that I will be required to give Minister Fudge Harry's wand. Is there some way around it, Sir? I know it sounds childish, but I don't want them to have it, not after the way Harry's been treated in the past."

For Albus, the issue was far more serious than Hermione made it out to be. Harry's wand was more than just Harry's wand to those who knew what it meant to carry the brother wand of a Dark Lord. Albus knew that the wand would be a powerful weapon against Tom Riddle whenever the Dark Lord chose to show himself again.

Albus read the parchment twice to properly absorb the message and have time to think of what to tell Miss Granger.

"You were right to bring this to my attention, Dear." He cleared his throat. "Yes, well. The Minister has no such power. Technically, no one does. Unfortunately for you, he has the political pull to take

Harry's wand anyway. He could pressure you in any number of ways to get the wand. In fact, the Senior Under-Secretary can do a lot in his name without his knowledge... all of it bad for you."

Albus watched Hermione's face go white at the thought of being targeted by the Ministry. As much as he wanted to protect her, there would be little he could do in the long run. Albus mentally asked forgiveness from Harry and offered Hermione a way out.

"There is an option available to you, Miss Granger. I trust you have not responded to the letter yet?" She shook her head.

"Well, then. Might I suggest that you make a donation to Hogwarts? You could give Harry's wand to the school." Hermione looked up sharply at the statement. Clearly she did not think this option was any better.

"At least you would still be able to see the wand on display, Dear." She wanted to argue back, but Hermione didn't trust her voice not to crack.

"By entrusting Harry's wand to the school, the Minister would be unable to seize it. I could, as a representative of the school, repel any moves the Minister's office makes to punish you for giving me the wand."

Hermione heard the sugar coated blackmail for what it was. 'Give me the wand and I won't let them hurt you.' Wasn't protecting the students the job of the Headmaster? Didn't he just say that?

"I... umn... I'd like some time to consider the offer, Headmaster." Hermione desperately needed to get out. She needed to go outside, to get as far away from powerful old men as she could get.

Half an hour later, Hermione found herself lying face up next to a smooth black stone memorial on the far bank of Black Lake. Hermione's feet were propped up on the rear bristles of Fleur's broom, her hands both held a wand on a chain as close to her heart as she could get it.

"Harry, please help me. I don't know what to do." Harry didn't respond. All Hermione got for her trouble was a soft breeze from the lake and the distant barking of an owl.

An owl... hm. With nothing better to do, Hermione pulled out the letter she received during breakfast that morning. At the time, Draco was being too much of a bastard for Hermione to want to see what little Gabrielle wrote this time.

She cracked open the Delacour seal and looked over the tidy rows of text that were admittedly better than Hermione thought the eight year old girl would be capable of. It was only after giggling a second time when she re-read the Post Scripts that an idea came to her.

-o\O/o-

"Momma! Poppa! Hedwig came back again!" Gabrielle jumped up from her chair and ran over to the majestic white owl, completely disregarding proper dinner etiquette along the way.

Hedwig brought a letter and a small parcel with her this time and leaned in for an affectionate head bump with the excitable Veela girl as she slid to a stop in front of the owl stand.

"Gabrielle! Manners!" Alain pretended to be angry with her, but it was difficult to be stern with such an excitable little girl. He liked seeing her smile like that.

"Sorry, Poppa. May I be excused to relieve Hedwig of her burden?" She used her very best pout. Though Gabrielle may be too young to use the natural Veela gifts that develop in puberty, she is still shockingly cute and an expert pouter.

"Very well, Little Angel. Please tell us who Hedwig has come for." Alain and Apolline shared a look. Hedwig almost always delivered mail to Gabrielle from Miss Granger. The elder Delacours were beginning to wonder if the beautiful bird had chosen to bond with one of the two girls after Mister Potter's death.

"It is for me, Poppa. And she has a present this time!" Gabrielle returned to her seat at a respectable speed and began to open the letter. Her father almost told Gabrielle to wait until dinner was done, but a soft hand came down on top of his. Apolline didn't want to see her Little Angel's smile disappear again.

"Oooooo! Hermione says that the English Minister is being mean to her and wants to take something of Harry's. She doesn't want the mean old Minister to get Harry's stuff, so she's giving it to me!" Gabrielle looked over to her mother and father. "Can I have the Harry stuff, Poppa? Will the Minister try to steal it from me too?"

The two adults shared a brief look before looking back to Gabrielle. "Let's have a look at it. Harry's Will left everything he had to Hermione, so if it was really his to begin with, then she's allowed to give it to you. Show me the box, Little Angel."

As Gabrielle dutifully handed over the box, Hedwig let out a bark of disapproval. She knew who the parcel belonged to. Alain drew his wand and cast a series of charms and spells into the parcel. He wasn't as concerned with the wrapping paper itself; the manor wards would have stopped the box were the outer wrapping enchanted in a dangerous way. Still, as much as he wanted to trust Hedwig and Hermione, he knew that there were people both in England and France who would not think twice of attacking him through his youngest daughter.

Alain, satisfied that the parcel was not some kind of trap, he handed it back to his daughter who tore it open with glee.

Both Alain and Apolline were surprised when the little girl gazed almost reverently at some object they had yet to see. She began to pull a thin gold chain out of the box. 'Did Harry wear jewelry?' The thought died quickly as all six eyes in the room locked onto the thin polished shaft of a Holly and Phoenix feather wand.

Without conscious thought, Gabrielle grabbed the wand by its base and gave it a gentle swish.

Before either of her parents could scold the child for holding a wand without permission, a bright golden glow left the wand and began to swirl around Gabrielle. A cloud of gold and silver sparks, with a few red ones for variety, shot out of the tip of the wand and bathed the family dinner with beautiful light and the tinkling of tiny bells.

Clearly Gabrielle would not find a more suitable wand for her future lessons, no matter how hard she may look.

"I think, Gabrielle, that we will be keeping this gift. Be sure to thank Hermione properly for sending you something that she must treasure dearly." Apolline would also be sending a letter to Fleur. The Delacour family would be looking after Miss Granger from now on.

"Yes, Mother!" A moment later, Gabrielle turned and ran to the Study intent on writing her reply letter as soon as possible. Hedwig hopped off of the Dining Room's perch thirty seconds later to follow Gabrielle.

-o\O/o-

With only one week left until the Third Task, the thin veneer of normalcy that had managed to cover Hogwarts in the last month began to peel away.

Most of the staff and student's of the three schools maintained a respectful distance from their Champions as it was very clear that the three were fully devoted to their training and studies. Triwizard Champions or not, Victor and Fleur both had N.E.W.T.'s to take after the tournament.

There was one notable exception.

"Bonjour, Fleur. Here you go; one advanced transfiguration treatise as promised." Hermione held a book out to the Veela Champion.

"Merci. I swear, one day I will figure out ze 'ogwarts Library." Fleur took the thick tome from Hermione's outstretched hands and smiled.

Hermione didn't mind picking things out of the Library for Fleur or Victor. She and Cedric both knew the library well enough to offer their help to the other Champions. Hermione would have been searching the library extensively regardless as Senior Under-Secretary Umbridge was sending her owls almost daily now. Delores had stopped pretending to be polite early on and was now using threats which were not remotely legal in execution. Hermione was shocked that the woman would insult her heritage in one sentence and mention the Dementor's Kiss immediately after. Sadly, books and scrolls on Wizarding Law were completely unorganized. Sometimes they were completely unavailable.

"Will Gabrielle be coming back with your parents to watch the Third Task?" The bushy haired Gryffindor fell in step with Fleur and a handful of other Beauxbatons students who were making the morning trek from their carriage outside to the Great Hall.

"She will be! I can't wait for Little Angel to visit again! I still owe her a make-over, Fleur." The brunette next to Fleur shot out rapid fire.

"Show us mercy, Segolene. The last time you dressed up Gabby, my teeth began to rot from the sugary sweetness you created." Fleur thanked her ancestors for the thousandth time that the Veela Thrall cannot influence other females. Due to jealous witches and their rumors, her social circle consists only of the more progressive heterosexual witches along with some of the school's bi and lesbian population.

"Are you saying that the girl can become more cute than she already is?" Hermione smiled at Fleur. "I don't believe you." In the past few weeks, Hermione began to spend time with Fleur inside the Beauxbatons carriage where several Delacour family albums full of wizarding photos illustrated just how adorable Gabrielle could be. Fleur was especially firm in her belief that Gabrielle would make her older sister appear plain in comparison when the little flower finally did start to bloom.

"You shall see the results for yourself. My Mother has already given me permission to extend an invitation. Would you like to dine with the Delacour family?" Fleur's question caused Hermione to stop in the middle of the hall. "Segolene will be there. I am also inviting Cedric and Victor."

"Are you sure? I mean, I'd love to dine with your friends and family. It would be an honor." Hermione fought down a blush as she thanked God that she wasn't left completely alone in the magical world. Fleur, Victor and Cedric had all begun to treat her as a friend and equal even though she was not a Champion... or seventeen. If you add the quiet talks she's had with several other Beauxbatons students, she could almost make up with quantity of friends what Harry gave her in quality. Almost.

-o\O/o-

"Professor, we've got some information for you..." Gabrielle paused for a moment. "We think it'll help you."

The young girl turned in her sleep. She was dreaming again just as she had for several nights in a row now. This time, her mother was ready.

"Are you going somewhere?" Apolline watched as her Little Angel continued to do speak fluent English. The girl's professor had requested the name of Gabrielle's private English tutor, but what was Apolline supposed to say? Consult a spirit board?

A dicta-quill was steadily recording everything spoken by anyone in the room and had been doing so since Gabrielle's bedtime.

"You're the Defense Against the Dark Arts teacher!" Gabrielle turned to the other side of her bed. "You can't go now! Not with all the Dark stuff going on here!"

The Veela ran her fingers over her daughter's forehead and through Gabrielle's silver-blond locks. As if being both witch and Veela were not enough, the girl was reliving someone else's life. Apolline began mentally reviewing what she would write to her mother's family in Marseille.

The dreaming Veela girl threw her right hand high into the air above her and shouted as loud as she could, "Expelliarmus!"

A blueish-white cloud of magic radiated out from the girl's open palm. Apart from scaring Apolline half to death, the magical wave washed over the bedroom furniture without any noticeable effect. Luckily, Gabrielle did not sleep with her new wand in hand. Apolline insisted on holding onto the wand whenever Gabrielle was alone. For now, it is a necklace only.

Apolline quickly pulled herself off of the floor and moved into bed beside her daughter. She may not understand what is happening to her Little Angel, but she will do everything in her power to make sure Gabrielle is always healthy and happy.

"Shouldn't have let Professor Snape teach us that one." Gabrielle muttered.

While Apolline coiled protectively around her daughter, Gabrielle prepared to lead Professor Lockheart into the Chamber of Secrets.

Gabrielle would scare her mother several more times that night as the eight year old girl met Tom Riddle deep beneath the stone floors of Hogwarts Castle, far, far away from her mother's loving embrace.

-o\O/o-

"Mr. and Mrs. Delacour, thank you again for inviting me to dinner. I'm honored to be here." Hermione called out, unsure if she should bow, curtsy or something else. Fleur and Segolene, who both got big hugs and kisses, were no good as social references.

"Nonsense, Dear! Please come in." Apolline reached over and pulled Hermione into a hug just as warm as she gave her own daughter. Continental cheek kisses followed. "And please call me Aunt Apolline. 'Mrs. Delacour' makes me sound so old!"

The Delacours were renting out a modest two story house in Hogsmeade for the week so that they could visit with their older daughter both before and after the Third Task. As a French Ministry Official, Alain Delacour also had an international floo connection temporarily installed just in case a 'Second Task' level crisis required official communication or action.

Within this house, Apolline had directed the Delacour house elves to prepare a meal for themselves and their guests. The guest list tonight included Hermione, Cedric, Victor, Segolene and Madam Maxime.

Both Headmasters were at first hesitant to allow their students to go unescorted. Fleur overcame this by publicly swearing a magical oath to forfeit the Third Task if either male champion were harmed attending her family's dinner.

"You may call me what you wish, Miss Granger. I will answer to 'Father' or 'Uncle' as easily as Monsieur or Alain." The man of the house bowed down to kiss Hermione's knuckles. As he did this, Apolline explained to the male Champions that they would not have to speak French tonight like Hermione did. The nervousness left their smiles.

"Your name is 'Poppa'! Isn't that right, Poppa?" Gabrielle shot into the room like a silk and lace missile in pastels with silvery-blond hair. A familiar wand was clearly visible hanging from Gabrielle's neck.

"Yes, Poppa! Come give your third daughter a hug!" Segolene practically hopped into the man's lap. Cedric and Victor may not have known what to make of the playful brunette, but Hermione had learned all about the girl and her long-standing friendship with the Delacour family.

Dinner went well enough. The Delacours were impressed by the caliber of students that became Champions. When Hermione tried to humble herself during a discussion about the three Champions choosing to train together, Victor would have none of it.

"Do not say such things, Hermione. You are smart girl. You are brave girl. You are pretty girl. I think Harry do vorld great favor ven he save you from troll." As Hermione dropped her head and blushed, Apolline considered the troll reference.

Apolline had heard Gabrielle dreaming about a troll once or twice. It would have been a pity that Gabrielle never seems to remember her dreams in the morning if not for the fact that a lot of those dreams seemed to be dark and nightmare-like. If she ever found this 'Uncle Vernon' man, she was going to go full Veela and ram a fireball up his ass.

"Hermione, Dear. The more I hear about Harry, the more I want to know about him. I don't trust the papers and my daughters can only tell me so much. Is there something you can tell me, to help me learn what kind of boy saved my daughter's life?"

Hermione knew that telling stories about Harry would hurt, but she also knew from the eight books on grief management she had read recently that she needed to tell someone. Her dorm mates were out of the question and Wizarding Britain seemed to know nothing about mental health treatments or counseling. She could do this.

"Well... the first time that Harry really showed that he had a 'saving people' thing, we were still First Years and... well... this troll had been let into the castle on Halloween night..."

No one interrupted her. Friend and family alike listened to a tale that hadn't been spoken aloud ever. Ron's version didn't count as he embellished the hell out of it. Cedric may have heard indirectly about the Philosopher's Stone and the troll, but he never heard about Norbert the baby dragon... or about the 'expert' traps that three Ickle Firsties navigated to give the Boy-Who-Lived an audience with Quirinus Quirrell. Don't forget Voldemort.

By the end of her tale of three First Year students against the world, everyone else in the room agreed with Victor's assessment. Harry did the world a favor when he saved this girl from a troll.

But it was getting late and Apolline refused to hear Hermione's apology for holding up dinner.

Hermione, Cedric and Victor learned more about Veela that night than had ever been taught at either Hogwarts or Drumstrang in the many centuries that both schools were open.

For instance, there is no such thing as 'half' or 'quarter' Veela. You either are Veela or you are not regardless of what the ignorant Wizengamot has to say on the subject. Veela are not native to the British Isles and with the British Ministry of Magic's attitude, they never would be.

The difference between most cheerleading and exotic dancing Veela and the Delacour women was based on the natural talents and abilities of said Veela's father. A Veela born to a non-magical father would have all of the natural Veela traits but would share her father's inability to use magical focii such as wands and brooms. They could at least see the magical world, much like squibs could. Tonight's hostesses were at the other end of the Veela spectrum.

Apolline was the daughter of a wizard who also married a wizard. Her daughters would not only have full Veela abilities at their maturity but would also have rather impressive magical talent on par with any pureblood or non-magical born witch anywhere on the continent. Is it any wonder Fleur became the Beauxbatons Champion?

It was all Alain and Apolline could do to ignore which teenaged wizard champion was trying hard to not look at which teenaged witch over dinner and dessert. Alain was restraining himself from his

usual duties as Husband and Father for one good reason; Two different teenaged boys were showing at least some resistance to Veela charms. That was too much potential just to kill one or both of them now.

"So... are you 'appy you accepted my muzer's and fazer's invitation to dine wiz us tonight?"

"Very much so! Thank you for letting me get to know your family, Fleur. I am so sorry for how the other girls in Hogwarts treat you. Why, if I were into girls, I'd want you for myself." Hermione gave the Veela a little wink before breaking out into giggles. Segolene's wink over Hermione's shoulder was somewhat less innocent, but her laughter was just as light and bubbly.

"Gabrielle! Where are you? It is bedtime for my Little Angel." Apolline's call caused a table near the girls to shake. A second later, all three girls listened as a younger girl scampered quickly away. Whether Gabrielle was running to or away from her mother, the older two girls had not a clue.

"I zink you have a big fan, 'ermione. If you can wait just eight or ten years, zen you can 'ave ze newer model of Miss Delacour. She is guaranteed to 'ave less wear and fewer wrinkles zen I will 'ave."

"I don't believe the 'less wear and fewer wrinkles' bit. I saw your mother tonight. By non-magical standards, she doesn't look old enough to be Gabby's mother, let alone yours."

"And what to you zink of Gabby? She was so proud having 'arry's wand out in the open. Our parents keep tight control over zat necklace you sent 'er." Fleur was proud of her little sister and hoped that her new friends would like the short ball of cuteness just as much.

"I love her to death! I've seen fan-girls around Harry before, even if he was clueless about them. Given a choice between someone like Ginevra Weasley or Romilda Vane and Gabreille Delacour, then I'll chose little Gabby every time." Hermione thought that the girl just glowed of happiness and love when Hermione was around her. Once she had to resist the urge to scan the room for Harry. She could swear it felt like he was watching her tonight.

"Oh! Did they tell you? About the wand, I mean?" Segolene wanted to see Hermione's reaction to the wand story.

"No. What about the wand?" Hermione was concerned. Had Gabby hurt herself? Was sending her the wand a bad idea?

"Ze wand... of course. Did you zink zat 'arry's wand would not react to Gabrielle when she picks it up out of ze box and gives it a swish or two?" Fleur tried to stay neutral in her question.

Hermione, as expected, assumed the worst. "Oh, sweet Merlin! Oh, I'm sorry – I should have sent it to your Mum instead!" Her imagination was taking up so much mental power that Hermione was reduced to speaking in English again. All of the things that could have gone wrong...

"Not to worry, 'ermione. Muzer wrote to me zat ze wand reacted most beautifully to Gabrielle. Zere were more sparks and glowing mist and tinkly bell sounds zen she 'ad ever 'eard of for any first time reaction before." Fleur remembered the first time she picked up her own wand. There was a soft glowing cloud and tinkling bells, but no sparks that she could remember.

"Sparks, glowing mist and tinkling bells? I only got sparks from my wand and I know for a fact that that's all that Harry got as well. He said as much." Tinkling bells?

"But really, ze wand is just ze tip of ze iceberg wiz Gabby. Ze mark, you saw it, no?"

Hermione had to keep from flinching. The mark was the first thing she saw. It was also where her eyes seemed to drift when she caught herself looking for Harry.

It was the same mark that Hermione sees on Gabby during her Harry Dreams.

She had been ignoring that mark until she recently heard a rumor about 'Potter's Mark' floating through the Beauxbatons students. It had yet to reach the lips of Hogwarts' students or teachers as far as Hermione could tell. She prayed that the language divide would remain in place until after the girls in blue went home to France.

"Yes, I saw it. Is that really... really where..." She couldn't finish the sentence.

"Where 'e kissed Gabby with 'is last breath and ze last beat of 'is 'eart. She swears it to be true, and Gabby is not prone to exaggerating zings like zat." The mark has had Fleur's mind racing day and night since her family arrived in Hogsmeade. It does not seem dark, but is is clearly unnatural.

"Little Angel is confident that Harry saved her life, not Dumbledore or Madam Maxime. She says his kiss was a magic kiss. That is why it does not fade." Segolene leaned to whisper the last two lines.

"Okay! Enough with the sparks and the marks. We have much more important things to talk about now that we three are alone." Fleur looked over to Segolene who nodded back. Sticking to French would help add privacy for this conversation.

"And what would that be?" Hermione had no idea where this was going.

"Silly girl! We will gossip about boys! What else could be more important for teenaged girls who have already talked about Dark Wizards and Trolls over lobster bisque."

"B-boys?" Hermione still had no idea where this conversation was going.

"Did you not see a world famous Bulgarian seeker favor you over all others in a room that had two mature Veela in it? And they say you are a bright witch..." The brunette was rubbing it in a little much, but Hermione really needed a clue. In fact, she needed a clue years ago.

Hermione blushed heavily and looked down.

"We are not saying that you should put Harry behind you, Hermione. Far from it. Victor respects Harry enough that he waits in silence for you to make your heart available once more."

"Wha- what do you mean?" Hermione was sure they must be teasing her. Or tormenting her, one or the other.

"Segolene put a listening charm on Cedric as the boys were moving away to talk quidditch." When Hermione turned to look at the face under the curls, Segolene tried on her best innocent look. She failed miserably.

"I did! I would have been in Slytherin were I English!" She preened herself while pretending to be snooty and arrogant.

"No. You are more like those twins in Gryffindor. Fred and George. You delight in mischief, but do not do it to cause pain or to put yourself above others." Fleur watched her friend's faux pride become genuine under the honest praise. Third Delacour sister indeed.

"Enough of that. We were trying to talk about boys!" Segolene pulled herself together a bit before continuing. "Cedric, or 'Ced' as Victor has begun calling him, was asking for advice on asking Veela out romantically. Victor, 'Vic' for short, said that his Veela fans were not 'classy chick' like Fleur here and his way would not work."

"You mean to say that Cedric is working up the courage to ask Fleur out?"

"I think that we really excited those two boys that first day you helped me with the Firebolt. Before that, both boys looked at me but rarely flirted. After that, Victor remembered why he asked you to the Yule Ball and Cedric started flirting with me more." This was all easy for Fleur to see. She was Veela.

"I... I hadn't noticed..." Hermione began to see it on on reflection. Why didn't she see it before?

"It's okay, you were and still are recovering. Victor is okay with that too." Segolene kept up with the conversation, but seemed to be distracted. Maybe it was an effect of using the listening charm.

"He is? What do you mean?"

"It's what the boys are talking about right now. Ced mentioned that you were still acting like a widow and Vic just responded that he intends the wait the traditional twelve months for a widow to grieve for her husband before courting you openly." Segolene began to spend more time following the boys conversation. "Okay, now they

are getting all pervy comparing the girls that each of them has already been with. Ced is jealous of Vic's two Veela conquests but Vic is asking about a... Chinese?... Chang?"

"Cho Chang? He slept with Cho Chang?" Hermione listens to the gossip mongering of Lav-Lav and Pav-Pav, even if she doesn't add to it. They've never mentioned a rumor about those two doing more than kissing.

"Not all the way. Just oral. Ced seems quite proud that he could get a girl that looks Chinese to scream and beg in a Scottish Brogue."

All three girls laughed at the idea as Segolene waited for the boys to say something equally incriminating.

"Miss Delacour! Miss Royal! Miss Granger! We must be on our way, Dears." Madam Maxime had come at last to collect her charges.

On the return trip to Hogwarts castle, Headmistress Maxime stayed with the girls while the boys were usually ten or twenty paces ahead. The girls abandoned the listening charm they had on the boys for fear that Maxime may discover it. Instead of spying, Fleur and Segolene spent the walk back describing Beauxbatons to Hermione.

"...and to just once wake up knowing that I won't have to ask the first ghost I see where the Defense classroom is this week... I tell you, Hogwarts is looking worse and worse in comparison." Hermione was seeing more and more wrong with Hogwarts, and Magical England in general, as the weeks wore on.

"Maybe you would consider transferring?" Hermione was suddenly very thankful that Cedric was out of hearing range.

"You think I should? I mean... can you even do that? I know non-magical students do it all the time, but I've never heard of someone transferring out of Hogwarts. Not once in Hogwarts: A History is the term 'transfer' even used." Hermione suddenly became very nervous. She had never considered transferring before.

Olympe couldn't resist butting in. She had heard Albus bragging about his favorite Gryffindor witch too often to let an opportunity like this pass by.

"It is precisely because no wizard or witch has ever considered transferring out of Hogwarts that it would work dear. Make your intent known at the end of the year when the Board of Governors can't meet in time to write new rules banning you from getting out." Hermione looked up at the Half-Giantess.

"I'm muggleborn. The governors would be as likely to write new rules forcing all muggleborns to transfer to Beauxbatons if they could get away with it." Hermione was saddened at how close to the truth her comment was likely to be.

"And I would take them in! Well, I assume that they could handle any differences in course loads between the schools. The muggleborn of England are far more likely to be accepted than their pureblood counterparts."

"B- but, you would consider me if- if I asked to transfer?" Hermione fought down the quivering that began to take over her jaw. Battling Dark Lords was one thing, but this was revising her future educational history. She only considered it because Hogwarts was fast becoming a reminder of all things dark and painful to her.

"Miss Granger," Madam Maxime replied with warmth in her voice, "I will forgive you the sin of being English if you would do me the honor of submitting an application to transfer to my school. As I doubt the English Ministry of Magic has such documents as transfer papers, you may have to create them yourself. I doubt someone as bright and thorough as you would have any trouble with that."

"Yes Mam. I mean no, Mam, I wouldn't have any trouble. I'll- I'll have to think about it though. It's a really big decision... and... umn" Hermione was about to melt down, the very thought of leaving Hogwarts and everything that had happened there... but at the same time how could she possibly stay? Every square inch of the castle reminds her of Harry now.

"Don't worry about it, Hermione. After the Task tomorrow, you can celebrate with the Beauxbatons students and work it out." Fleur tried to settle Hermione's mind, but knew she had fallen short of the task.

"I have an idea to distract you. Want to hear it?" Segolene was wearing a very Weasley twin smirk. This might actually work. Hermione nodded.

"Imagine that you have a tattoo of a golden snitch right above your labia." Hermione's eyes went wide. "Now... when you go to sleep tonight, your dreams will be full of Harry and Victor on their brooms trying to beat each other to the snitch! That's a good one, yes?"

A very red Hermione stuttered out the story about Harry's first quidditch game and the snitch he caught in his mouth. Segolene and Fleur both roared in laughter.

-o\O/o-

"Hi, Harry!" Gabrielle appeared without warning in a rowboat in the middle of Black Lake. The sun was out, the clouds were soft and puffy looking and a gentle breeze kept her hair from getting in her face. How nice of her dream to do that with her hair!

She liked Harry Dreams. They were always so nice. If only he would let her remember one for more than five seconds after she woke up in the morning.

"Hey, Gabby. Sit, I'll show you what this lake is supposed to be like."

Harry seemed to look over the side of the boat for a moment as he noticed something that she couldn't see.

"Just give me a minute, Gabby. I've just got to put them in their place before we can get started."

Gabby sat on the passenger seat of Harry's rowboat as he pulled one oar out of its oar lock and began to beat the surface of the lake repeatedly.

"That's right you bloody wankers! She's with me now!" Harry looked back up to his passenger. "Don't mind them, Gabby. They're here for some dark goings on, but I put a stop to that, didn't I?"

Gabby giggled. She would never realize that she would have had a nasty nightmare tonight about being pinned to a dead Harry Potter if this seemingly alive Harry hadn't caught her in a rowboat first.

Harry reset his oar and began a slow, easy circuit around the lake.

"Oh! You won't guess who I saw today, Harry!" Gabby's face lit up. She wanted to tell him all about the dinner with her big sister Fleur and Fleur's very very very close friend Segolene and Hermione.

"I give up... who?" He was smiling. Gabby knew he knew the answer, but he still played her games. Every day she loved him more for it.

Harry listened intently as the little Veela told him all about her big day back in England. She was a very big girl and only cried a little bit when she saw the lake shore through a tree line. Harry told her that he knew for sure that Hermione still cried when she went down to the lake some times.

"Harry?" Gabby looked like she was about to ask that question that she always asked.

"Yes, Gabby?"

"When are you going to go back outside? Can we do it tomorrow?" Harry liked it when she referred to being in the real world as 'going back outside'. Here in her dreams, Harry could do anything she believed he could do except 'go outside' when she woke up.

"Soon, Gabby. Soon. I don't know if tomorrow's the day, but this whole 'being dead' thing is kind of hard to figure out at first." He pulled in his oars and let the boat drift on an invisible current. "Thanks again for letting me hop into 'Mione's dreams too. I'm pretty sure I've stopped almost as many nightmares on her side as I've done in for you."

Gabby smiled. "She said you had a 'saving people' thing. You sure do!"

After a rather heated tickle war, the two calmed down and held hands.

"Ready?" Silver-blond locks bounced up and down as Gabby let Harry get ready for the hard part.

Harry took a few deep breaths, and with Gabby's hands in his own he willed their presences over to his other favorite Sleeping Beauty.

"Harry! Gabby! Come on up!" Gabby let go of Harry's hands and followed him up a cast iron spiral staircase to where Hermione seemed to be sorting through some old periodicals. Hermione usually didn't pay much attention to Gabby, but the eight year old didn't mind so much. Hermione's library was full of neat stuff. Maybe Hermione would teach Gabby how to not forget her Harry Dreams one of these days.

"Gabby! Don't go running away on me, we have a new topic to discuss tonight." Hermione had their attention now.

"Well, you see... I was thinking of transferring..."

End Chapter

Chapter Three: Blood of the Enemy

June 24th, 1995

"So... on my whistle, Cedric!" Said Bagman. "Three – two – one –"

He gave a short blast on his whistle, and Cedric removed his hands away from Victor's and Fleur's shoulders before walking into the maze. The maze itself was dark and silent. Whether by magic or by the nature of such a tall, thick hedge wall, nearly all lights and exterior noises were blocked from following the young man to his destiny.

Rather than tie up his wand casting Lumos, Cedric began throwing bluebell flames into the hedge face. God bless Hermione; it was her idea.

Just as he came to the first fork in the maze, Cedric heard Bagman's whistle blow a second time. Victor was now in the maze with him. Cedric cast another bluebell flame at the wall splitting his path and stopped walking.

The first fork in the maze. Their agreed upon meeting place. From here, the three Champions would move forward together.

Hermione had been so touched when Fleur told her of their plan to honor the one Missing Champion that she insisted on giving all three Champions tear stained good luck hugs and kisses. Let the rest of the crowd make of that what they will, but Hermione couldn't bear the thought of losing anyone else, not for some pretty cup and a bit of money.

Blast-Ended Skrewts, odd mists with odder effects, even a sphinx. Not once did the three Triwizard Champions split up to seek their own way through. Cedric, Victor and Fleur would take the cup together or they would not take it at all.

It was only when the three were mere steps away from the end goal, the Triwizard Cup itself, that the greatest threat almost caused Fleur to follow Harry into the afterlife.

To be fair, it was a pretty cup. The rich detailing and elegant curves drew three pairs of eyes just long enough for an immense spider,

perhaps one of Aragog's clan, to leap into the small clearing around the final prize and slam the Veela Champion face down into soft grass.

Acting mostly on instinct, both male Champions whipped their wands up and cast whatever came to mind. Cedric's Reductor Curse bounced off of the spiders magic resistant carapace but Victor's Bone-Breaking Curse struck right in between the large spider's many eye sockets. The hit caused a shower of black gore to spray out of the beast's face as the spider shrieked in pain.

Fleur regained her footing while Victor and Cedric continued to hurl their most destructive curses at the monster's body, forcing the wounded arachnid to scramble back over a hedgerow and out of sight.

"Well, boys. While I like to get my ass pinched sometimes, I zink zat next time ze one to do it should not be quite so big or 'airy, yes?" Cedric snorted.

As their hearts collectively began to slow, the three Champions surrounded the Triwizard Cup. Each raised their left hand above the trophy, fingers touching in a ring. For a few seconds, the three teens scanned hedge tops and path openings behind their co-Champions in a bout of spider induced paranoia.

"Of course... now ve look over backs..." Cedric snorted again at Victor's special brand of humor and a smile began to work its way up Fleur's delicate lips.

The Tournament was almost over. She wondered if Harry would appreciate how much the three of them did together. If the boy was anything like Hermione portrayed him to be, and she would know better than anyone, then Harry was likely to congratulate them on this shared victory. If only he were here today, she would show him how much she herself has changed... how much the world can change.

They nodded to each other and brought their hands down as one. Three school Champions felt a tell-tale jerk behind their navels. Howling winds and swirls of color assaulted the winners, one and all.

A portkey.

-o\O/o-

"Vic? Fleur?" Cedric pulled himself up off of the ground to find both of his fellow abductees sweeping the nearby grounds with their wands, looking for any sign of who or what may have been responsible for their change of scenery. Taking the hint, Cedric palmed his wand and began to look around.

He immediately noticed that they were in some kind of graveyard. There were a few trees mixed between the graves at odd intervals. In one direction was a hill with a dark manor home, not a trace of life inside.

"Dis is not part of Tournament, I think." Cedric nodded immediately. "Fleur? Try apparate out now, please."

Fleur twisted in place for a moment. Nothing. She looked to Victor and shook her head.

"I agree. Headmistress Maxime told me zat touching ze cup was ze final step to victory. Zis portkey, it is trap for us. But, which one were they 'oping to get?" Fleur knew that hidden portkeys had been responsible for more than one disappearance in her family. With her being Veela and her father an important politician, the Delacour girls were well trained in avoiding strange objects. On the other hand, it was well known that she would be entering the maze last and would have had the smallest chance of reaching the cup first.

"Someone is coming." Fleur and Cedric both spun to look at a figure that had been approaching from between the graves.

The figure, which appeared to be carrying some kind of bundle, had stopped abruptly. If it was the person responsible, catching all three Champions must have gone a long way towards upsetting their plans.

Cedric and Victor kept their eyes and wands firmly on the figure three rows away. Fleur turned slightly and looked by the nearest yew tree. Her aim followed her eyes.

"Zey are not alone. I zink I can 'ear someone by ze tree." Fleur focused as much as she could on sounds. She tossed a bluebell

flame near the base of the tree, but no man nor woman stood in relief as far as she could see.

The other figure seemed to hesitate for a second before... mumbling?... and setting it's burden on the ground. A loud hissing noise filled the air, causing all three Champions to tense up.

As soon as a green glow began to build on the stranger's wand, both boys knew what to do.

"Avada-"

"Stupefy!" "Diffindo!"

Victor was quite pleased that his friend had remembered the wisdom he shared in training of Durmstrang's Dark Arts lessons: the best shield against the killing curse is to keep the enemy from finishing the incantation. The two word killing phrase is longer than most good fighting hexes and the caster will have to still be alive if he is to finish the second word.

Whatever Fleur was looking for must have taken that hissing noise as a signal. She finally caught sight of movement much closer than she was looking for it when a large snake suddenly reared into view and struck out.

"Infractus!"

Fleur's curse didn't stop her foe, but it did cause the massive snake to fly off target. Poison soaked fangs grated along Victor's shoulder instead of the soft skin of her neck as intended.

"...aaaAAAAUGHhhh..." Victor is no stranger to pain, as he is often the target of internationally known beaters as well as some of the more aggressive seekers, but the potent venom released onto his skin and into his blood was a new level of hurt beyond blunt force trauma.

Bright red flared over Cedric's hastily erected shield shortly followed by a hail of purple sparks from a second spell impact. Fleur stood between the snake and Victor, a stream of fire spells pouring out of her wand and forcing the snake to back out of striking range.

"We need to get out! Perhaps we kill man and snake?" Small tremors were beginning to make Victor unsteady, but he held his wand firm and began to send more hexes and curses back towards their human opponent.

Fleur was about to respond when a second loud hiss was heard from near the figure's dropped burden. Fire or not, the snake was likely coming back.

Fleur's moment looking for the snake cost her as her other opponent switched strategies and summoned the outfit she was wearing.

As Cedric yelled out in dismay, Fleur sailed over two rows of tombstones and the snake made a second assault on Victor. It latched onto the Bulgarian's arm a few inches below the first wound and began squeezing for all it was worth. Victor's howl of pain broke Cedric of his momentary indecision. He instinctively chose to deal with the threat that was in arms reach and began to pump every curse he knew into the thick scaly hide of the beast crushing Victor's left humerus.

Fleur opened her eyes. Her vision was slightly blurry after that landing and a small line of fresh blood dripped down from her right temple to her shoulder.

Her first thought after regaining her senses was that tombstones hurt more than she thought they would. The French Champion began sliding her hand through the grass to her right hoping to feel the familiar wooden shaft of her wand, but it was not to be.

Two wands appeared before her face, one in each hand of their cloaked attacker, and one of them was hers.

"M- Master... please... I-let me keep this one... o- only for a little while. Master?"

Fleur heard another voice, but with two wands in pointed at her, she dare not look away. "We must hurry! You fools have almost cost me everything! Kill her and subdue the Diggory boy. Nagini can have the other."

They both thought that she was helpless.

Both were male voices. She was Veela.

Both of them were wrong.

Fleur Delacour released her allure to it's fullest extent. Silvery-blond locks which had begun to soil in the fighting were suddenly as spotless and shiny as polished silver, each strand floating in an invisible wind. Her skin was pure and soft, forming feminine curves that were more perfect than any the cloaked man had ever seen.

When he looked into the Veela's eyes next, he was instantly lost in a crystal blue infinity. She was not human, nor was she mortal. Fleur Delacour was a Goddess among lesser beings, the very incarnation of Aphrodite.

"You wish to touch me, yes? To know me intimately?" The words were sweet and airy. Addictive. The cloaked man nodded dumbly yet his companion seemed to hiss in anger.

Fleur held on hand out, palm up. Her wand was immediately returned by the would-be rapist.

"We must make love under the stars by Black Lake. How do I get back to Hogwarts?" Words flowed from her perfect lips, causing the man to shudder in pleasure until he heard her last question.

The figure seemed to cringe. Was he trying to fight off her allure? Was fear overriding magical thrall?

Fleur pushed her nature as far as she could without physically changing. She didn't want the transformation to shatter her allure.

He seemed to settle down. "How do my friends and I leave?" One does not refuse their Goddess.

"P- p- p- portkey. I- it goes back just like it came here... " He then began mumbling phrases over and over, "you're sooo beautiful... ...I'm going to die... ...dead, I'll be... ...an angel, I..."

He was no longer an issue, but she took his wand anyway. Hopefully this second voice was some sort of communication device and not another man. To hide from her after such a release of her

allure would require rare power. Men who can resist Veela allure either make the very best of lovers or the very worst of masters.

Fleur loped back through the headstones to Cedric and Victor to find them both still alive, but in horrid condition. Blood was on the stones, the ground, even on both young men, but she did not see the snake. It was time for her to pull in her allure as not to further harm them.

"Finally ran the damn thing off." Cedric flinched and held his wand hand. "But the venom, I can feel it."

Fleur looked between both Victor and Cedric. Ced wasn't shaking like Victor, but he probably would be soon. Victor, on the other hand, was bad off. There was no sign of the Bulgarian's wand though he seemed to be unconsciously scraping the ground looking for it. He needed a healer now.

"Accio Victor's wand." Aside from hearing a loud hiss in the distance, no wand returned to the Veela.

"Vic jammed it into the damn snake's eye. I think that hurt it more than any of the curses I threw."

"Zen we need to go now. Zat man may recover soon and I forgot to check him for ozer wands. We should hold onto each ozer before I summon ze cup. If we touch it togezer again, we go back." Fleur visually searched the ground for the trophy cup. With several patches of burning grass littering the graveyard, she easily caught sight of the light reflecting off of the cup's crystal facets nearby.

"That simple? Why didn't we try that from the start, anyway?" Cedric grabbed Victor's shaking hand. Fleur stepped around the two bleeding boys. As she passed over Victor, her silver-blond hair fell across his injuries and soaked up some of the venom tainted blood that was even now escaping through jagged holes in his arm. Her own blood dripped onto his body and down to the grass below. She placed a delicate hand over Cedric's, carefully insuring that she was in contact with both boys, and summoned the Triwizard Cup.

Soon, all three Champions felt the familiar tug behind their navels and the world became a swirl of colors and wind.

Maybe this portkey journey would mark the end of their troubles.

-o\O/o-

After near total silence in the graveyard, the cacophony outside of Hogwarts Castle was just another shock to the system for the returning students. The co-champions were now the center of attention for hundreds, if not thousands of people. Cedric and Fleur immediately added to the noise.

Albus Dumbledore reached the three Champions first, but many of the officials, staff and spectators began rushing to the obviously injured teens. Any semblance of order was lost when those nearer to the front began shouting back to their friends and associates about snakebites and an abduction of some sort.

"Not dead!"

"No! But he looks to be near it!"

"Diggory?"

"Krum, but Cedric's hurt too! Even the French bird's bleeding!"

Hermione remained close to Alain and Apolline as the French Champion's father roughly shoved others out of their way to be at Fleur's side. Segolene had spent much of the tournament with the Delacours and Hermione, but was off with several other Beauxbatons students when the three champions did reappear. Hermione held Gabrielle's hand in hers to insure that the over-tired little girl would not get lost in the crowd. Tonight, Hermione was learning far more about how to swear in French than any of her family vacations or books had revealed in the past.

"-an attack! The cup was a portkey! But who-"

"-must have been after the girl! Heard something about her robes getting summoned with her in them!"

"Wish I'd thought o' that myself, actually!"

Alian paused for a moment. Hermione could see him glaring hard in the direction of that last comment. After learning another rather savage bit of French about what Alain would do to the unidentified

man if they ever met again, he re-focused and started forcing a path through the crowd again.

Hermione noticed Apolline's demeanor change soon after they both caught sight of Madam Maxime not too far away. The Delacour mother began helping her husband clear a path through the thick knot of wizards and witches they had become a part of. Perhaps she had seen Fleur through the crowd too? Hermione looked down to Gabrielle after feeling a bit more of a tug on her hand.

The little Veela was barely hanging on. It was well past her bedtime and there had been very little to see from the stands, so Little Angel was nearly asleep on her feet. In her drowsy state, Gabrielle had begun rubbing the mark on her forehead not unlike Hermione saw Harry doing countless times in the past. For the hundredth time that night, Hermione glanced at the slim gold chain around Gabrielle's neck that disappeared down inside the little witch's robes. She had absolutely refused to come without Harry's wand. Made her feel safe, she said. Hermione couldn't help but agree as the polished wooden shaft had the same affect on her when she wore it.

Maybe she should ask Harry if he really did kiss Gabby there if she sees him in her dreams tonight. She hoped he would appear as this has been a very stressful night and would likely get more so.

"Make way! Make way!" Someone very near to them was clearing a path in the opposite direction. "Injured Champions and healers approaching so you lot can bloody well move back!"

Hermione got her first look at all three Champions. The crowd shifted to allow Headmaster Karkarov and a pair of floating beds attended to by Madam Pomfrey and several other healers angle past her position on their way to the castle. Hermione briefly noted that Fleur was only a few meters away now and surrounded by two Headmasters, several ministry officials and a handful of aurors. Fleur was alternately yelling and being yelled at by a man in a bowler hat as she carried the Triwizard Cup under her left arm. If the cup was a portkey then someone must have already checked to ensure it wouldn't work again. Despite the blood clearly present on Fleur's head, Hermione's attention snapped to her other close friends who occupied the floating beds.

Cedric looked like he was beginning to shake, but otherwise seemed alert and active. Mister Diggory kept pace with his son's bed and glanced over to his son's bandaged right hand every few seconds or so. It looked like he was in need of a healer himself... or more likely a stiff drink. Cho Chang was also at Cedric's side. She latched onto his bed and kept sobbing in between demands that he not ever do that to her again. Cho quickly grew tired of matching the bed's pace and hopped on to better cover his mouth with her own. While Hermione noted that Cedric wasn't about to refuse Cho's kiss, he was clearly not returning the pretty Ravenclaw's affections as fully as he could have. The healer nearby clearly had a problem with Cho's impropriety and threatened to draw her wand unless the young miss removed herself from Cedric's person.

Girl troubles or no, Cedric was clearly on the road to recovery so Hermione felt free check the second bed. Oh. Oh, no. He looked... thankfully not as bad as Harry did four months ago when she snuck into the tent by Black Lake, but... he looked very bad off. Victor's face was pale and the skin around the exposed wounds was turning an ugly shade of purple. He seemed to be sleeping but a spasm would pass through his muscular frame every few seconds or so. Two healers by his side maintained constant charmswork over the bed as they passed through the crowds. The healers were a good sign to Hermione. Their continued actions meant that Victor must have a chance to recover.

Hermione would never forget seeing Headmaster Dumbledore give up on Harry in favor of helping Madam Maxime heal a bloody Gabrielle.

Suddenly she was moving again. Alain had taken advantage of the break in the crowd to pull his women, Hermione included, the few remaining steps to his eldest daughter.

"Maman!" Fleur dropped the trophy and lept at her mother. The silver-blond Veela then began crying hard enough to make Cho look tame. Her tears were soon joined by her mother's as the woman began to console her firstborn.

Fleur's trip through hell tonight now includes being accused alternately of attacking the two male champions herself and/or making up parts of the story about a supposed 'Master' who was never seen. Cedric was quite firm in shooting down everything that

the rather toad-ish Ministry witch kept accusing Fleur of. The bitch even had the nerve to call Fleur a half-breed in front of everyone a minute ago. Madam Maxime was maintaining her composure, but easily found a way to return every insult and accusation with a skill that would have impressed Headmaster Dumbledore had he not been trying his very best to maintain order and prevent an international incident. There was also the concern of who this 'Master' was that Fleur spoke of. Albus could hazard a guess but there was nothing useful in their story aside from everything happening in a graveyard. It should be a small matter to get Mister Diggory's memory of the event. Miss Delacour's memory would be vital though.

Ludo Bagman picked up the forgotten cup, flicked off a rather plump looking beetle and began to clean off any dirt that he could find. His frown was more for the one dilemma he had to put to rest tonight as the Head of the Department of Magical Games and Sports. How do you award one cup to three competitors? It would have been better if they had just let him declare Fleur the winner as he attempted to do when the Champions first arrived. She clearly had sole possession of the Triwizard Cup at the time. As an added bonus, he had a side bet on the bird with very long odds. That would have been his biggest score in years. Then the Veela and Cedric spin their tale of abduction and poisonous snakes and he has three winners in stead of one. Fuck.

"A tie then. No other way to do it with their story." Ludo looked to the two remaining school heads who both nodded. Karkarov would have agreed and they knew it. "We'll have the cup rotate between schools or something... and split the prize money three ways as well."

As Apolline and Fleur continued to moisten each other's shoulders, Alain stepped forward and began demanding an explanation. Hermione found herself alternately holding Gabrielle steady, listening to the explanation Alain was receiving and wondering at the glare sent her way by a rather ugly witch.

Professor Snape appeared from behind the Headmaster and whispered something into his ear. It seemed to be a quick message but an important one as Albus seemed to lose his color and looked down to Snape's arm for a moment. Snape only nodded in response.

"Please attend to your duties with utmost care, Severus. I shall expect to see you as soon as possible afterwards." The Potions Master turned sharply and left in haste. For a moment, Professor Snape clutched at his left forearm briefly as he moved away. Albus looked around the group of officials and security personnel. Alastor Moody was still unaccounted for as he had been since the Champions returned wounded.

When Apolline began to move Fleur away from the officials, Hermione dutifully followed with Gabby in tow. As they stepped away from those in charge of the proceedings, Hermione missed the harsh glare being cast her way by the Ministry bitch. The woman rubbed her thumb over a medallion hanging from a heavy chain about her neck.

For several minutes, the Delacour women plus Hermione moved out of the excited and gaping crowd until a suitably quiet spot could be found at the far end of the stands. Segolene had seen the group leave the crowds and was now adding her tears to Fleur's damp shoulder.

"Where are we?" Gabrielle appeared to be getting a second wind. The hard candy pop now forming a bulge in her cheek may have something to do with it. Gabrielle dropped onto her butt in the grass and began to scratch an ankle.

"We're behind the stands, Gabby. Your mum and Fleur needed a bit more peace than they were getting in there." The grass actually looked soft to Hermione, so she joined Gabby in her new game of plucking individual grass blades and tearing them in to smaller and smaller pieces.

A cool breeze was beginning to pick up.

While Fleur was calming down on the walk out, she, Segolene and her mother all began to cry harder again. Hermione dug her hands into her armpits and shook in the cold. Funny, it wasn't supposed to be so cold tonight.

Gabrielle stopped tearing grass blades apart when she saw something approaching in the darkness. Four dark somethings. She drew her knees up and hugged them with one hand while scratching her forehead. It was going all ticklish again.

Hermione noticed Segolene and the older Delacour women hold each other tighter and begin to shake. Something was wrong. Before her sharp mind could connect the dots, Hermione began to hear Gabrielle wailing, only she could clearly see Gabrielle wasn't moving her mouth. Then a memory began to overlap her vision. It was the Second Task all over again in her mind. Shaking and tearing up, Hermione turned around to see a line of Dementors come up to the four witches.

"GO AWAY!"

A bright white flash of light shocked Hermione out of her panicky thoughts of soul death. When she looked behind her, Hermione saw Gabrielle standing with Harry's wand out and pointed at the Dementors who sought to feed on them. Hermione turned around again to see what kind of spell 'allez vous-en' would turn out to be.

It was a patronus. A magnificent fully corporeal being of light was running, yes running, after the dementors who had all turned to flee. After tackling one of the soul eating dark creatures and roughing it up some, the patronus turned back to his charges and returned to his caster. The threat, however dire, was now over.

When he got close enough, the patronus looked over to Hermione. It was a boy her age, with glasses. Glasses and a corporeal lighting bolt shaped scar on his head. Gabrielle had used common French words to summon a Harry Potter patronus.

Patronus Harry seemed to smile and wave at her before walking through the three sobbing older witches. He came out the other side a little dimmer, but also in sharper focus. Fleur, Segolene and Apolline all quieted down and began to look around. When they also spotted Patronus Harry, he smiled and walked up to Hermione who was still quite leaky in the eyes.

Before she could pull it together enough to tell a patronus that she loved him, he stepped through her as well. Oh, wow. Hermione felt a wave of warmth, love and happiness flood through her completely removing the dark taint that the soul eaters had left behind. Hermione turned to see Patronus Harry kneel down in front of Gabrielle with a big smile on his face. He was dimmer again but in

perfect relief. That's what Harry would look like if he were a ghost and not a patronus.

"Brilliant work, Gabby! Utterly brilliant!" He talked! "I never knew you could say something else when casting... Flitwick and McGonagall are going to be in for a shock when they hear about this."

"Harry!" He looked back over at Hermione who was now crying entirely different tears than before.

"Yeah, 'Mione?" He smirked that smirk of his. "Oh! Thanks for sending my wand to Gabby, here, Love. An excellent move on your part, but then you are brilliant... always loved that about you."

He used the word. Twice. "I love you, Harry Potter. I love you! I'm sooooo sorry I n-never got to s-say that w-when you were alive." The girl fell to her knees and just stared at him with tear tracks glistening down both cheeks.

"And I love you, Hermione Granger. Why is it that Gryffindor courage failed me so thoroughly when I should have told you that before? I mean with all of those things we did togeth-" Harry looked back to in the direction of the crowds. "Oh, dear. The masses must have figured out that we were hoarding all of the peril over here."

A large group of people were approaching, a furious Alain Delacour and a curiously pleased Albus Dumbledore at the head of the group. The women ignored them completely to focus on the ghost before them.

"You came outside! Yay!" Gabrielle went for a Harry Hug and fell right through him. Giggling she got up and did it again. "That tickles!"

"That's right Gabby. I'm outside now. I think I can be both out here and in there pretty much as needed. Maybe. You kind of showed me the door when you told those blighters to sod off."

"Harry! Language!" She may have gotten a piece of Harry back, but Hermione was clearly going to have to keep him in line just as she did before.

"Sorry, 'Mione. Won't happen again." His pout may have been transparent, but it still softened her up some.

"Love you, Harry!" Gabby was full of energy, nearly dancing in place. With Harry out and about, this night's schedule had now been shot to hell.

"Love you too, Little Angel! And thanks again for saving Hermione here from the Dementors. Really. She's going to have to do something about those things. Two years in a row... honestly."

"Thank you, Mister Potter. You saved us all, Gabrielle for the second time now, and I'm still not sure how..." The three older witches had come up to the spirit. Were he a solid being, he'd be in the middle of a massive Veela-Bookworm group hug. Clearly Gabrielle had already proven that such a thing wouldn't work. "What does my Little Angel mean, Harry? Outside?"

"An excellent question, Madam Delacour. I think a great many people would like to hear how Mister Potter came to be 'outside' and where he was before." Headmaster Dumbledore spoke up once he was within a few paces of Harry and the Delacours. Seems like the plump beetle which had been flicked off of the Triwizard Cup by Bagman was looking for sustenance in Albus's beard.

Alain pulled his wife into a tight embrace which their girls quickly joined. Clearly they would be out of the conversation for some time. Hermione was left alone to gaze at Harry until Gabrielle ran over to her and pulled her back to the family hug. Gabby must have adopted her as a new big sister. Fleur grabbed Segolene and pulled her in the same way.

"Sorry to disappoint, but that's going to be between me, 'Mione and the Delacours." Harry floated over to face the Headmaster who now stood at the head of a group of wizards and witches several hundred strong. Shouts of 'Potter's Ghost' and 'Harry's Back' were being thrown further back into the crowd causing several men to run off to spread the news. It seems a sure bet that tomorrow's Daily Prophet would be full of big news. Whether anything that was printed would resemble the truth was still open to debate.

"Then perhaps you can tell me how Hogwarts came to be your new home? Or perhaps how you were able to drive off dementors? That is not a talent ghosts are known to have." As Albus asked his

questions, that angry ugly woman from before stood to the side as her boss came forward.

"Harry! Good to see you again, boy! Very good to see you again. I can't say I like the circumstances... terrible night we're having, but it should be over soon." Minister Fudge almost reached out to shake Harry's hand before remembering that the lad was a ghost and couldn't do that now. He settled for adjusting his hat.

"Hello again Minister. I'll have to agree on the night. It can't be good for Fleur here to come back from an attempted kidnapping and Lord knows what else only to be assaulted by Dementors. Did you know they were here, Sir?" Harry peered into Minister Fudge's eyes. Fudge briefly looked back at his assistant before turning back to Harry. A lot of people were going to hear about this. He just knew Monsieur Delacour would make a big scandal of it when he got back to France.

"The Dementors were being held in the local forest in case of an attack similar to the World Cup over last summer. New defensive plans you see... never can tell with Black on the loose... perhaps next time these lovely ladies will seek a more reasonable location to have their witch talk when odd things are afoot." Hermione found she didn't much care for this Minister's logic. Wait a tic. If that's Minister Fudge, then that horrid woman next to him might be-

"Delores, the Dementors are behaving, are they not?" He looked back to her again. Delores Umbridge shot a quick glare at Hermione before plastering a smile on her face.

"Yes, Minister." She ran a finger over the heavy medallion dangling from her bosom. "They are all in the forests just to the north now. Perhaps they caught a bit of Black's trail from the year before when they happened on these... ladies... and thought they were onto something. Surely they weren't in any real danger? The Dementors only Kiss when we tell them to after all." Hermione really did not like this woman.

Harry looked back at the Veela sandwich Hermione had gotten herself into and smiled.

"Mister Potter, perhaps we should try this again. How did you drive off the dementors?" Albus was being insistent. Harry, now knowing a

fair amount about the last few months from dreamscape talks with his girls, wasn't the obedient boy Albus may remember. Death can do that. Hearing Hermione point out how often the headmaster would interfere in Harry's affairs even after his death can do that too.

"Do you mind? I'm having a moment here and it's the most loving sense of belonging and family I can ever remember witnessing." Hermione looked up into Harry's eyes, the tears kept flowing, but she wasn't wailing any longer.

The Headmaster wisely held back on questioning his relationship with the Dursleys. If Harry answered poorly, reporters would overhear.

"Harry, you have saved my Little Angel again. You have now saved me and my firstborn as well. Our family will be in your debt for eternity, I swear it." Apolline was shaking, but had managed to control her voice.

"Tell you what... let me spend time with Gabby and your family whenever I want and we'll call it even."

"My home is yours and it will never be even. We owe you too much." Alain finally managed to break free of his family.

"I am afraid, Mister Potter, that ghosts have never been so free roaming as that. I believe that as you died here, were buried here and became a ghost here that you will always be here... at Hogwarts." Albus tried to sound apologetic, but he couldn't have been more pleased with this turn of events. The Boy Who Lived may have perished, but if his ghost still calls Hogwarts home, then there may yet be hope for the future. Perhaps the prophecy is still valid?

Harry almost growled at the Headmaster's proclamation. His head swung around to the two young witches who meant so much to him that he would punch soul eating demons in the face. Harry's gaze passed briefly over a worried Hermione and a somewhat less happy Gabby. If he stayed here, then he wouldn't get to see them grow up. Wait a minute...

"I don't believe you Headmaster." Albus didn't have to fake his surprise.

"Oh? And why not?" Harry figured he knew his own circumstances a bit better than the Headmaster.

"I died holding Gabrielle. I died kissing her. When I died I gave everything I was to Gabrielle so that she may live. I came into being in this form as a sort of ghost-patronus or something to protect her. If anything I am tied to Gabby assuming I can't just go where ever I please."

"And who, may I ask, cast the patronus?" Albus would have his Charms Master look into this. Perhaps Filius knew something about the patronus charm and related spells that could be connected back to Albus's knowledge of ghost abilities.

"I did!" Finally! Gabby wanted to say something too, but they were all just talking over her head. Not now!

"I told the things to go away and Harry jumped out of my wand and made them go away! He does that, you know... saves little girls from monsters. Saved Hermione from a troll before he was twelve too! Harry's great! I bet you didn't save anybody from a troll when you were eleven, but I beat Harry. Harry, I beat you by saving Hermione before I was nine. Are you going to go back in time and save her when you were seven or five? I bet you could." She pulled her Harry wand out and used it to scratch at an itch in her hair.

"Gabrielle Marion Delacour! A wand is not for scratching your head with!" Apolline knew well that Gabrielle could get that wand to work and had no wish to see the girl magic herself to pieces. "That wand is a necklace only for the rest of the night!"

"Sorry, Momma." Gabrielle pulled her outer robes out from her chest and dropped the wand back into place before idly scratching her forehead. The wand necklace suddenly seemed very familiar to some of the adults and students near the front of the crowd.

"Aren't you a little young to be running about with a wand, Miss?" Minister Fudge eyed the little girl nervously. As she was obviously one of Monsieur Delacour's, Fudge knew that the girl was here with diplomatic credentials. Just as well, the Prophet's likely to do more harm to them than the Wizengamot could.

"While my daughter clearly needs to learn the difference between a wand and a comb, I am very pleased with what she has done with that wand tonight." Her Poppa's words made Gabrielle blush. "Now, If you would excuse me, my family is in need of rest and I have much work ahead of me. Our Ministry must know of what has transpired here tonight."

After some more official good nights, Alain finally set his women on the trail to Hogsmeade. Those who had yet to leave the fields continued to stare and gawk at Harry Potter, The Boy Who Came Back, but none seemed to have the courage to approach him yet. He was quite thankful for this as there were still things he needed to discuss with Monsieur Delacour.

Albus watched in disappointment as Harry successfully crossed out of Hogwarts grounds and onto the trail to Hogsmeade. Perhaps the boy was right about his connection to the little Delacour girl.

"Sir."

"Please call me Alain, Harry."

"Alain. Headmaster Dumbledore is paying entirely too much attention to Gabby right now, Sir. I think... I think perhaps you should take your girls back to France as soon as possible. All three of them."

As Alain watched, Segolene began pushing chocolate into Fleur's mouth. Fleur was just beginning to act normally for the first time since she prepared to enter the maze hours ago.

"Perhaps, Harry... we should see to all five of our women?" Alain nodded his head to the side. Harry followed Alain's gaze past the hoards of shocked and confused spectators to once again see Madam Umbridge staring daggers into Hermione.

"Bugger... maybe you're right sir, but I don't know if I can get Hermione out of Hogwarts quick enough."

"It's Alain, Harry, and I think she would die tonight if you asked her to." As if sensing that Harry and Monsieur Delacour were discussing her, Hermione looked up at the man and spirit. Harry saw it in her eyes. She would.

Harry had to try something. Maybe it would work, maybe it wouldn't.

"Dobby!"

-POP-

The excitable house elf looked like he was about to praise the Gods or suffer a heart attack.

"Oh! It's-"

"Shhhhhhhh!" Dobby froze the second Harry shushed him. The elf appeared to be waiting for leave to breathe. "Yes. It's me. Dobby, can you discreetly collect all of Hermione's things? All of her things that she does not have with her right now?"

Dobby shook his head in the affirmative.

"Can you get her things to the Delacour family elves without letting anyone know what you're doing?"

Dobby paused for a moment, but nodded to that request as well.

"Please do so, Dobby. I would really appreciate it if you could do this for me."

Dobby mouthed out 'Dobby will do as the Great Harry Potter Sir asks' before meekly leaving.

-POP-

"Such an unusual house elf. However did you meet him?" Alain was shocked that an elf would answer the call of a ghost, but then again he'd never heard of a ghost calling for an elf's attention before.

"I'd be delighted to tell you all about Dobby tomorrow. Now, Si-Alain... If you don't mind, I'd like to check up on Cedric and Victor. I think the girls would feel better if I could tell them how things are going with those two."

Alain nodded his approval and moved to be closer to his women. "I think I can protect them well enough in your absence. We'll be floo-

ing to France as soon as we enter the rental home, I promise. We'll leave the clean-up to the elves and they'll be happier for it." He showed Harry the wand held firmly in hand.

"Thank you Sir, I won't be long. And I meant what I said about Gabby earlier... I think you will be seeing quite a lot of me in the future, Sir- er, Alain."

The older man laughed. "Anytime, Harry. Feel free to spend as much time as you like with my family... and I want to hear about that elf!"

Harry drifted closer to Hermione.

"Mione. I'm going up to the Hospital wing to check up on Cedric and Victor, okay?" She smiled and nodded her approval. "I'll be back with you and Gabby soon as I can be. Promise. Now can you promise me that you'll do what Alain tells you to do for the rest of the night? It's important."

Little more than four months ago, Hermione would have scoffed at such a request without explanation. Tonight was different. Harry had come back for her and he loved her and he asked her to stay with Fleur and Gabby.

"I don't like it when you leave me, Harry." She was sad, yes, but Hermione had shed her last tear for the night already.

"I never left you, Mione. Never happened."

"Can I have a kiss first?"

"Me too! I want a Harry kiss too. I've only had one so far." Gabby was going to be trouble when they finally got her in a bed tonight... or was it already morning?

Harry zipped down and gave Gabby a light peck on the head. Same spot. She bust out giggling.

"Tickles! I want Harry kisses every night." Harry smiled before drifting over to Hermione.

"Not on the forehead, Harry. Or the cheek. Kiss me proper. Please?" Harry's smile wasn't quite as bright as for Gabby, but it was a lot warmer. A ghostly blush crossed over Harry's cheeks.

As he drew closer to Hermione, she tilted her head to one side and let her eyelids drop just a little. Harry matched her actions before delicately connecting his being to hers.

Tingly.

"Oh, it just breaks my heart! How beautiful." Segolene teared up at the rarest and most tender kiss she had ever been witness too. "Romance novels are written about such things, but they fall short of the truth."

Apparently all of the ladies agreed as even Gabrielle had a look of awe on her face and the others were leaking at the eyes again.

Harry was going to have to figure out how he knew what Segolene said. She said it in French, he was sure of that, but for some reason he still understood every word.

"Take care of my girls, Alain. I'll see you all later!" And with those words, Harry Potter leapt straight up and seemed to adopt the path of a broomrider. The speed too if the few faint cries of random witches and wizards further away were any indication.

No-one noticed a lone beetle take flight. A few minutes later, when a woman seemed to appear behind some bushes yet well inside Hogwarts wards, one person did notice. A wizard carrying a camera came out of hiding and began to discuss his evening with the witch in hushed tones.

-o\O/o-

"You weak fool!" The Master's voice called out from the cloaked man's wrapped burden.

"I... I beg your forgiveness, Master! She enticed me! Her Veela allure was too strong... I... what must we do?" The cloaked man was on his knees groveling before the bundle.

"You will continue as planned. Use my wand if you can't get the boy's to work for you. If you fail me here, then Nagini will be well fed and I'll be rid of your failure." The man cringed and removed his cloak to better prepare things.

"Wormtail. There is plenty of blood on the ground and stones to collect. Don't take the Veela's blood! There is no telling how that could affect the potion." Peter Pettigrew nodded. He wouldn't want to run the risk of becoming a woman or even a mix of both sexes either.

The spineless Gryffindor collected his burden and moved him near a large stone cauldron.

"Hurry! This body will not support me for much longer." Barely holding the panic and dread at bay, Peter used Victor Krum's wand to light a fire under the cauldron. It wasn't a perfect match for him, but the wand would work for simple tasks.

As soon as sparks began dancing over the surface of the unfinished potion inside, Peter removed the childlike form of his Master from the cloth bundle. After flinching from a malevolent glare cast by the snake-faced child with red eyes, Peter dropped Lord Voldemort's current shell into the potion.

He raised his wand high.

"Bone of the father, unknowingly given, you will renew your son!"

Dust came up from a grave nearby. The headstone read 'Tom Riddle'. The potion hissed and sparked and changed colors as they tend to do. After a brief inspection of the surface, Peter continued.

Now for the hard part.

"Flesh – of the servant – w-willingly given – you will – revive – your master."

Peter screamed loud and clear as the blade he carried passed through his own hand, cutting it clean off of his body. Fear can make you do terrible things.

With a small splash, the severed hand joined Tom Riddle's remains in Peter's dark potion. He wailed for just a moment, but only a moment. His Master needed him to perform the ritual properly and on time.

Peter staggered around to point in the general direction Nagini's battle with the two young men before continuing. Victor's wand again held high.

"B-blood of the enemy... forcibly taken... you will... resurrect your foe."

Long thin ribbons of blood began to pool together above the ground into an amorphous blob. The mix was far from pure though no dirt or mud came with it. Different blood types began to fight against each other and a small amount of snake venom attacked all blood without bias.

Peter directed his last ingredient into the great stone cauldron and collapsed. Sparks erupted bright enough to force the injured man to shield his eyes with a bloody stump. The sparking jet of magical light extinguished itself in a great cloud of steam.

Something moved.

"Robe me."

End Chapter

Chapter Four: Promises to Keep

June 24th, 1995

As the steam began to thin out, Peter observed his Master moving away from the cauldron. Even without seeing any of his Master's features, he could tell from odd jerky movements that his Master was anything but comfortable. The Gryffindor traitor got to his knees and crawled over to the cloak pooled on nearby ground.

After grabbing the cloth with his only hand, Peter's struggle to stand again was painful as well as physically taxing. His right stump was still bleeding and showed no signs of letting up. If he didn't get some treatment soon, resurrecting the Dark Lord would be the last conscious act of his miserable life.

Shaking from blood loss, Peter turned to do his Master's bidding. Peter almost dropped the cloak again when he saw his Dark Lord clearly. The steam dispersed enough that Voldemort was exposed.

What a horrific sight he was.

Voldemort warned Peter about the Veela's blood. In truth, his warning should have been more detailed than just that. Calling for 'blood of the enemy' in his spell work did a fine job of straining out anything that was not blood spilled by Champions that night. Unfortunately for the Tom Riddle and Peter Pettigrew, it did nothing to address the issue of multiple blood types. Even without the French Champion's blood adding non-human and female genetics into the mix, the two remaining pureblood male champions did not share the same blood type. As any non-magical doctor or nurse can tell you, mixing two blood types before using them in a patient can be a fatal mistake; different blood types don't get along well together. Nagini's venom could have killed him as easily as anything else were it not already a part of his most recent shell. Add these three different issues together and only the dark magical nature of his previous and current forms prevented him from returning to mere shadow, an existence that took Voldemort ten years to escape last time.

Voldemort was bleeding everywhere. Blood seeped from several deep fissures in the mottled scaly skin covering his body. His musculature also seemed uneven and malformed. He was neither

as tall nor as lean as he was that Halloween night when his original body was lost to magics that are still unknown to him. The Dark Lord had a theory about the boy's mother and blood magics, but it could never be proven now that Potter was dead. No matter, he was alive and the boy was not. If nothing else, he believed that the prophesy must have been fulfilled when Crouch indirectly caused Potter's death. With the Potter boy out of the picture, only Dumbledore had luck and power in sufficient quantities to give the Dark Lord any trouble. If this body was as flawed as it at first seems, he would merely take another before crushing Dumbledore and his inept Order. He would rule all in time. He would, but only after making his current displeasure known.

At Peter's pause, Dark Lord Voldemort rolled his shoulders back and channeled all of the pain he felt into a glare. Caught in his Master's furious red gaze, Peter wet himself.

"Can you not even follow one simple command?" Voldemort was never known for being patient, but Peter could hear it in his Master's words. Punishment. Hard, cold and painful punishment would be visited upon him. All he could do was postpone the nightmare by serving as well as he could... or bleed out before his Lord noticed.

Peter finished covering his Master's form, carefully avoiding the odd bony protrusions on Voldemort's upper back which looked like scabbed over wing roots. As soon as he presented his Master's wand, Peter noticed small wet patches begin to soak through the cloak. More fresh blood.

"Show me your arm." Every syllable was ground out through clenched teeth.

Peter raised his bleeding stump before the... not a man... the thing that stood before him.

"Crucio!" Voldemort's cursed Peter. Voldemort himself didn't know if it was due to Peter's poor choice or simply the need to cause pain in another being.

The torture curse flew out fast and true, striking Peter full in the chest. Peter lost himself to the pain for he didn't know how long. He only regained control of his own body when a foot slammed into his crotch.

"Your other arm, Wormtail. Get up and show me your Mark." Voldemort began to pace unsteadily back and forth. This was a tiresome game and the night was far from over.

Peter struggled to get up. It was harder to rise this time even without a cloak in his good hand. He felt lightheaded but managed to raise his left arm enough for the Dark Lord's needs. A slick blood covered hand came forward to hold Peter in position as a yew and phoenix feather cored wand dug roughly into his exposed mark.

As Peter howled in pain, his Master called two of his servants over the bond. One, he would call to task for recent failures and the other he would use to fix this colossal failure.

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Harry tore through the air between crowds of shocked and confused Tournament spectators on his way to Hogwarts Castle. Dozens of adults and students alike tried to hail the ghost as he flew past, but he did not turn to acknowledge any of them. He promised to get back to Hermione and Gabrielle as soon as possible and living or dead, Harry did not break his promises.

Thinking as a seeker, he went over the outer castle wall and into Hogwarts' main courtyard. He dove right for the closest pair of entry doors to the castle proper and came to a halt upon finding them closed. To the left of these closed doors he spotted a rather amused looking Ravenclaw House ghost and her companion, a younger Ravenclaw witch with dirty blonde hair.

"Excuse me ladies, but I'm in a bit of a hurry and need to get inside. Could you perhaps open the door for me?" Harry rocked back and forth as if on a broom in non-existent wind.

The witch simply tilted her head to the side and stared back.

"I am sorry young man, but as I am also a ghost, like yourself, I cannot open this door." The Grey Lady replied with a smirk clearly showing.

Harry wasn't willing to play her games. "I'll just find an open window or something then. Sorry to have disturbed you ladies."

As he flew up and across the castle face looking for an open window into one of the hallways, the young witch turned to her ageless companion.

"Nargles?"

"No dear. Mister Potter is clearly unused to being a ghost. Why, it took me four hours to remember I could pass through closed doors and another week to simply go through walls and ceilings instead of using hallways and staircases."

"Oh, well that's not so bad then." The witch lost track of Harry and turned her gaze back to her house's ghost.

"Highly amusing, but not so bad at all, dear." The two returned to their private discussion now that it was private once again.

Up in a fourth floor corridor, the ghost of Harry Potter finally managed to gain access through a conveniently open window. Due to the Third Task and the late hour, his high speed rush down three corridors and two stairwells went without incident. The old oak doors of Hogwart's Hospital Wing were in sight in under a minute. In the back of his mind, Harry regretted never trying to fly through the castle on his Firebolt like that before he died. It was brilliant.

Luckily for Harry's mental state, the doors were still open.

His entrance into the main ward went unnoticed as all eyes were on the wounded Bulgarian or on Madam Pomfrey and her associates from St. Mungo's. Harry lifted himself up to get a seeker's eye view of the wand waving and potioneering around Victor.

"Potter? Am I dreaming?" Cedric was the first to catch something in his peripheral vision as he was observing from two beds away.

While three professionals of the healing arts ignored their less critical patient's call, one other observer was in the room. She looked over to Cedric and then followed his gaze to a point almost directly above her.

"Auch! I must be dreaming too! Me cub's come back!" Minerva McGonagall was nervous enough at the very real risk of losing a

second young man to this year's Tournament that seeing the ghostly Golden Boy of Gryffindor floating above her shook her to the core.

"I'm glad to see you as well Professor McGonagall..." Poppy almost stopped what she was doing at his voice. Almost. "...but I told Hermione and Fleur that I would find out how the boys are doing. We Champions stick together, you know."

"That we do, Harry! Why don't you come over here before Poppy figures out how to kick us all out for disturbing her work?" Cedric began to sit up, but Minerva stepped over and pushed him back down onto his bed with a firm hand. "Cho followed us in and got the boot right quick with her tears and moaning."

The Deputy Headmistress cast a muffling charm between the frantic team of healers and their new group of three.

"So, Cedric. How are you and Victor doing?" Harry tried to ignore the fact that neither of them had seen him alive or otherwise in months.

"Don't you 'how are you and Victor doing' us young man! Have mercy on my old heart, Mister Potter, and tell us how you came to be haunting us." Minerva was close to tears. Check that, she was crying now.

"A story for a story... deal." But what to say? Harry wouldn't really mind these two knowing a bit more of the truth than others, but he really didn't want the Headmaster to get the full story out of them. If he had to admit it to himself... then yes, Harry was being more than a little spiteful.

Headmaster Dumbledore was still lucky in a way. If Harry really was tied to Hogwarts forever, then he would never have given the old bastard a moments rest. Harry had secretly seen plenty of horror movies when he was supposed to be locked in Uncle Vernon's cupboard and he had taken Hollywood's idea of ghostly haunting to heart.

"Why don't we start with everyone's favorite French family plus dear Hermione having a bit of a cry behind the stands after you two were carted off... not Alain though, he was busy yelling at Dumbledore."

"She's okay then?" Harry looked over to Cedric. "Fleur, I mean. She was bleeding and I never did find out why."

Harry stayed silent. Cedric began to suspect why.

"Alright. You caught me. I fancy Fleur. Quite a lot actually. I'm going to break up with Cho before the end of the year. She's nice and all but she's got a bit of a jealous streak. You wouldn't believe the things Cho says about Fleur when she doesn't think I'll overhear." Cedric was red faced by the end of his admission.

"Good on you, mate. I can't say for sure whether Fleur returns those feelings or not, but you won't know until you ask. Back to the Delacour women plus 'Mione. Well... Minister Fudge must have thought that with all of those vulnerable students and parents gathering to watch hedgerows shake for an hour or two that he needed some dementors around to keep things lively."

"He didn't!" Minerva didn't want those damned things on Hogwarts grounds last year when she knew they would be out and about, but to have some around and not tell anyone?

"Well it may not have been his idea. Did you know that Senior Under-Secretary Delores Umbridge has been making threats on Hermione's life?" At this pronouncement, Cedric started to sit up again and Minerva had to hold a hand over her mouth. It wouldn't stay closed on its own. "Our dear Headmaster only promised to protect her if... big if... she gave my wand to him instead of to the Ministry. That's what the threats were about – my wand."

"But I haven't seen her wearing it lately. Did she hand it over?" Cedric hadn't ever thought to ask why Hermione stopped wearing her favorite necklace. Didn't think it was his place to ask.

"She handed it over alright. To Gabrielle. It was Gabby using my wand... well I guess that makes it her wand now... but it was Gabby what summoned a patronus to chase all the baddies away."

"Little Gabby cast a patronus? She's what, eight years old?" If Cedric was shocked, Minerva was speechless.

"A Harry Potter patronus at that! Me! I shot out of the wand and chased off those demonic wankers. Do you have any idea what it's

like to get shot out of a wand? Has that ever happened to anyone other than me? Anyone at all?" Harry looked between them. Confusion and disbelief were now replacing shock as the dominant expressions.

"You're a talking patronus? You look like a ghost to me..." Well, when you put it that way...

"Well, it was like I was wearing the patronus spell or something. I was wrapped up in warmth and love and it was completely brilliant. Pretty sure I'm a ghost though. I can't really describe it better than that, Ced. Maybe you can get Professor Flitwick or our dear Professor McGonagall here to take a stab at it." Harry noticed movement at the edge of his vision and turned to the door.

Students, many of them Gryffindors, were pushing to get a look at him. As the doors themselves were still open, Harry figured that Madam Pomfrey must have brought up a ward at the door or something. Wasn't it past curfew yet?

"So that's my story, Cedric. Let's hear it then." Harry still had young women to report to.

On the other side of Madam Pomfrey's door wards, a group of redheads fought along with everyone else who came to see the Boy-Who-Came-Back.

"Bloody hell, it really is him. Harry! Oi!" Ron jumped in place a couple of times trying to get his onetime best mate's attention, but the apparition continued to speak to Cedric and Professor McGonagall.

"Give it up, Ron. If we can't get in, then they probably can't hear you either." Ginny may not have had strength enough to muscle through the crowd, but she found it easy to follow Ron, Fred and George to the front .

"Hey! He see's us. Harry!" Ron just yelled louder.

For his part, Harry held out his left arm, pointed to his wrist and then held up all five digits on his right hand.

"What's that supposed to mean, then?" Ron really didn't know.

Another student called out in annoyance, "Do purebloods not wear wristwatches? He's signaling us that he'll be done in five minutes."

All Ron could do was wait. If he was lucky, Harry would be too loud or something and get ejected from the room first.

"...and so they get the poison out of my veins pretty quickly. Might take a few days for the hand to really heal up as the venom was some nasty stuff, but otherwise I'll be fine. I'm still the lucky one. Vic got more of the venom in him. A lot more venom." The wizard, witch and ghost all turned to the badly wounded young man only two beds away.

All three healers were still working frantically, faces sweating and wrinkled in concentration. Victor seized up unexpectedly causing the healers to start calling out to each other. Due to the muffling charm, none of the three could hear what Madam Pomfrey was saying, but it must be serious. House elves began rapidly popping in and out of the room transferring a wide assortment of potions, towels and other things. It looked bad.

"Wait a tic. I... I have to do something." Cedric and Minerva both looked back to Harry. "I think... I think I'll go have a little chat with Vic now... only take a moment, I promise."

Before either of the two living magicals could react, Harry Potter disappeared.

-o\O/o-

"Where am I?" Victor Krum was confused. Only a moment ago, the Bulgarian was in intense pain. The last thing he remembered clearly was ramming his wand into that damn snake's eye. After that was darkness and pain.

Until now.

He felt no pain. The sky was crystal clear, he'd swear it was a warm spring morning if it weren't for the fact that there was no sun in the sky. No shadows under him, either. Victor found himself leaning back into a seat somewhere in the stands of a truly magnificent quidditch pitch. The whole place was spotless. The only thing he

saw out of place was a lone broom resting in the middle of the field and... was that a brief flash of gold off to the side?

"Victor!" Victor snapped his head around to see Harry Potter hovering a few feet away, hands and feet firmly gripping a Firebolt.

"Harry Potter? I am dead?" Victor mentally berated himself for not figuring it out sooner.

"I wouldn't say dead. Maybe almost dead."

"You understand Bulgarian?" Victor didn't expect that.

"Not really. It's something about meeting you here. To be quite honest, Vic, I'm not sure why I got tapped for this job. It's instinct; I can tell you what your options are now even though nobody bothered to tell me what they were before I got here. If it weren't for the fact that I like you and you've been very good to Hermione and Fleur, then I'd be writing out a letter of complaint or something." Harry delivered this all with a straight face. Victor laughed. Harry joined him in laughter soon after.

"So, Harry, what are my options?" Vic began eyeing the broom below. It looked just like his.

"Well, you see... there's this snitch running around up there and you and I are going to chase it. This thing we're doing will end as soon as one of us get's the snitch."

"But what does catching it mean?" Victor wanted to know if he should lose on purpose.

"I can't say. But Vic, are you honestly going to tell me that the one time you and I get to do battle over a pitch, you're going to let me win?" Harry wore a wicked smirk by the end of his challenge.

Victor put on his game face.

"Potter, I will crush you."

"Prove it, Krum."

Their battle was fierce. The snitch was never out of sight and the two seekers never let up. Harry pulled out all the stops and Victor delivered World Cup level aggression and skill. Each seeker had made it to within inches of the golden snitch over and over again only to be rammed off course or shaken by the snitch itself.

While an epic seeker duel played out somewhere between life and death, Victor Krum's heart stopped.

"I got it! I win!" Victor was ecstatic at his victory. Harry came around the victorious Bulgarian and clapped loudly in applause.

"Shall I tell the girls? Cedric? This game was special, you know." Harry slipped further away, but Victor didn't notice. He had the snitch.

"I want to tell them. I'll do it myself." Victor squeezed hard, almost crushing the delicate looking golden ball.

There was no bright light, but there was darkness and pain. He'd been there before.

-o\O/o-

Professor McGonagall dropped the muffling charm.

"We're losing him! He's seizing up!" Poppy was a whirlwind of motion as were her two fellow healers, but they seemed to be fighting a losing battle.

"Heart stopped!" The wizard of the group ground out. He quickly leveled his wand directly over the organ in question and charmed a small lightning bolt to pass through the patient's chest. The badly wounded body contorted as electricity worked up and down various muscle groups.

"Bloody... gone. The patient is lost to us." The wizard stopped his work and looked at his companions.

Two spells later, the witch from 's seemed to accept her peer's decree and ceased her work.

Poppy was frantic. She'd never lost a patient in these halls before and damned if she was going to fail now. The lightning spell.

Again.

Again.

She only stopped her work when her wand hand began to shake uncontrollably.

Before she could bring up the courage to announce her first personal failure ever, a familiar form appeared directly above Victor's body.

"Come on, Vic. Show me what you're made of." Harry was looking down with a grin.

Minerva almost bit his head off for the insult until Victor Krum moved on his own.

"I von de match, Harry. Qvit vining like little bitch." The Bulgarian Triwizard Champion rolled onto his side and went to sleep.

When five pairs of eyes in the room all bored into Harry, he held an index finger to his lips and went, "Shhhhhhhhhhhh. He's had a rough night."

As his business was done here, Harry Potter passed through the door ward, sliding from total silence to the dull roar of overexcited, under-supervised students. Maybe as soon as the Deputy Headmistress could be pulled out of her faint...

There was a group of redheads right below him. Harry mentally cursed. As much as he wanted to run to Gabby and Hermione right now, he might not get a chance to talk to this lot again for a long while.

Harry darted down quickly before saying something in Ginny's ear and darting away at broom racing speed.

"He said he'd make a quick stop in the Common Room!" Ginny yelled out her comment when people began to demand Harry's whereabouts.

As soon as the crowd began to thin out, Ginny moved. The twins looked at each other and smirked.

"Oi, Gin-Gin. You're going the wrong way."

"Oh no, she's not, Ronnikins..." Fred began.

"...she just lied is all." George finished.

Three minutes later, four Weasleys entered a girl's loo on the second floor.

"... and so snicker and so when ol' Albus says 'who, may I ask, cast the patronus' she raises her hand like she was in class or something and yells out 'I did!'" Harry laughed.

Myrtle fell to the floor laughing. Then she kept falling. A few seconds later, she popped back up through the floor.

"Harry, you prat! When were you going to tell us you were a ghost?" At Ron's query, all laughter stopped.

Harry looked at Myrtle, who only shrugged and looked over to their guests.

"Now that's a fine hello, isn't it? It took me four months to figure out how to do this and that's how you greet your ex-best mate?" Harry didn't look happy. He didn't look surprised either.

"Don't pay him any attention, Harry..." George started, to which his brother finished with-

"... a teaspoon, remember. Usually it's a green one, too."

"Okay! Okay! I get it! I'm a shallow, jealous berk!" Ron took a deep breath.

"Don't forget immature."

"Thanks, Ginny. You're a big help." Ron almost took another deep breath, but thought that the twins might say something next. "I'm immature. When I think of what you wrote in your will, well, you were

spot on. I was shallow and jealous for all of thirty minutes when Hermione went to Gringotts without me. Then I figured it out. I figured it out even before seeing your cut on fair-weather friends in the Prophet."

"You were a good mate, Ron. Better than most."

"Better than most... except for one, right?" Harry nodded. "Yeah, I don't blame you mate. 'Mione always was a better mate to you than I was, girl parts and all. I wanted you to be just like me. She wanted you to better yourself. I... I can't help but think that if we weren't best mates... well... maybe you'd still be around. Alive."

"Ron, those mermen were going to spear Gabby no matter what I did, and believe it or not, all three of the other Champions have said that they would have died the same way I did for the same reasons. Seventh Year of age Champions, mate. I grabbed Gabby, therefore I had to die. That's all there was to it. Not. Your. Fault." Harry may have revoked Ron's 'best mate' privileges when he signed the will, but he had been willing to sweep it under the rug between the First and Second Tasks. Ron wasn't perfect, but he wasn't bad either.

"Still feels that way mate."

"I have regrets too. They may say that the only two constants in life are death and taxes, but as far as I can tell the only constant in death is regret. Want an example? Something to think about before you meet your own end however many years down the road it is?" Ron wasn't the only redhead who nodded. Myrtle nodded, not because she wanted to hear Harry's example, but because she knew exactly what he meant.

"Ginny, you're a girl. You tell me, knowing me and 'Mione... when do you think was the first time we ever admitted to loving each other out loud? When was our first kiss?"

Ginny lost focus for a moment. After a sharp intake of breath, she looked back at Harry, "Was tonight your first night as a ghost?" He nodded. You could almost see the pain wash over her body. "It was tonight, wasn't it? You never got to kiss her when you were alive, did you?"

His silent confirmation was all that was necessary. She started tearing up. "Oh... oh, Harry. I'm so sorry. You never got to... to..."

"Not one kiss. As I was too young to remember my parents before they died, I do not remember a single person ever saying that they loved me. Hermione did love me but she didn't say it and I never got a kiss from her, not before I died."

As three boys dug deep in order not to cry like their sister, a soft voice interrupted.

"I can one up you there Harry, not that I'm proud of the fact." Myrtle drifted closer to the living in the room. "Moaning Myrtle. That's me alright. I cry more than any other ghost you've ever heard of, don't I? Why am I such a hosepipe? I died like you, Harry. A virgin. Never got to kiss or be kissed. You know that at least one girl loves you and you know your parents did too. Me? I was a social outcast before I died. With my blood status and my dorky glasses, no boy would touch me. I remember Mum and Dad... they did love me at least. But boys? Never. Your right about regrets Harry, every ghost has them."

"I can't promise to be around much, Myrtle, but when I'm near, I will say hi." Harry smiled at Myrtle. She could be a true friend. Harry and Myrtle were of the same rare breed.

"Thanks Harry. I can wait. I'm rather good at that now."

"Hold on... what do you mean you won't be around much? You may not be a student here, but Hermione still is. You want to stick around for her don't you?" Ron was confused. Didn't Harry just admit to loving Hermione? She's got years to go before she's out of Hogwarts.

"Well, I would hang around more if she were staying, but as she's probably already in France, then it won't be much of an issue." If that didn't cause a Weasley to explode then nothing could.

"Wh-what the bloody hell do you mean 'already in France'?" Ron was going red again. Harry had to wonder what the flush was from this time.

"I mean that a wicked hag in the Minister's office has been making death threats to Hermione and our beloved Headmaster has been doing shite to stop it. He wanted something Hermione had. Something of mine." Harry paused. "Granted, Umbridge wanted the same thing. No-one felt like respecting my will if they could get around it, apparently. Thank God for the goblins."

"So that's it then. You leaving us tonight?" Just Fred. Must be the somber mood.

"Can't avoid it, mate. Hermione needs me. Gabrielle too. Must really be past Little Angel's bed time..."

"Take care H-Harry." Ginny was getting all weepy.

"Now you stop that, Ginny. I can't hug you like you make me want to when I see you tearing up." Harry absolutely hated having to leave a girl like this.

"Just pass through her Harry. It's not the same, but it's as close as you're going to get."

"Thank you, Myrtle. From now on you're my unofficial big sister. Walk me to the front gates?" Myrtle blushed and nodded. She could go that far, but hadn't done so in a very long time. "Anyone else coming?"

"I-I c-can't." Ginny couldn't move. As Weasley's stick together, her brothers chose to stay by her side.

Harry passed slowly through the sobbing witch, then turned around and kissed her on the forehead. The ghostly affection only made the girl cry harder.

"Well, I don't know when I'll be back, but one day I will be. Count on it." With that, Harry and Myrtle left the bathroom. Through the closed door.

-o\O/o-

Albus was hard at work in his office, as always when his fireplace flared green. Moments later, Severus Snape exited the flames, cleaning the soot off with a quick flick of his wand.

"Ah, Severus. It is good to see you in good health considering the poor company you must now keep." Albus set down a quill and briefly took in his Potions Master's appearance. "What news have you of Tom's resurrection?"

"He is a fearsome sight, not quite the man he was before but then he was already changing by the time the brat got lucky." Severus would never, could never show respect to a Potter. "Without the boy, how do you plan on defeating him? Or is it time to knock Trelawney around a bit until another prophecy shakes loose?"

"Ahhh, Severus. Who says we are without Mister Potter?" Albus took a sip of tea as he watched Severus try not to flinch at such a proclamation.

"What do you mean by that, Headmaster? He's dead!" One cannot be beholden to a corpse.

"He appeared as a ghost tonight on Hogwarts grounds when Ministry dementors approached the Delacour ladies and Miss Granger, not long after you left." Albus continued to stare at his spy in the enemy camp.

"Is it too much to hope that one of the damn things actually got Granger this time?" Snape went too far and he knew it. Albus would expect him to think that question but not voice it.

"That wasn't nice, Severus. Do you really want anyone to experience that most horrible of ends? Soul death, Severus. Voldemort's most painful means of execution is still a blessing as compared to that." Albus set down his teacup. "But that is beside the point. How did things go?"

"It was a full meeting of the Inner Circle, the free ones anyway. He is wasting no time in assembling his forces. Don't expect them to announce themselves though. He will no doubt use a delicate touch, Slytherin to the core. Don't be surprised if the 'notorious' Sirius Black becomes a silent terror in the night." Severus almost smiled at that.

Albus was quite disturbed. With the Ministry under Fudge's leadership, Lucius Malfoy might as well be the sitting Minister. Imperius victim or not, he was far too dark to hold the reins of power.

Was it asking too much for Tom to have made some mistake in the ritual?

"Did nothing go wrong for Tom, tonight?"

"Not unless you think Pettigrew nearly dieing to complete his Master's ritual is a setback. The fool was unprepared to deal with all three Champions and would have been stopped outright were it not for Nagini's assistance." Severus held back an insult or two aimed at the rat animagus. Why insult him from afar when you can ram dark potions down his abused throat at your leisure? "I will, of course, be required to brew many special orders for the Dark Lord for the foreseeable future, sometimes at a moment's notice."

"Of course, Severus. I will not prevent you from fulfilling your tasks... all I ask is a list of what is brewed and when. And an accounting of our potion ingredient stores as usual." Albus pulled out fresh parchment and began writing a notice to the Board of Governors. Alastor Moody was no longer in Hogwarts. Even his things were missing.

"I'll see myself out, Headmaster. It's been a long night." As the Head of Slytherin House turned to exit, the Headmaster nodded and continued his notice.

-o\O/o-

"Harry!" Gabby leapt off of her bed rousing Hermione from her half-sleep as she did so.

"Gabby! Why aren't you asleep yet? It's so late at night that it must be morning already." Harry found a padded bench near the largest window in Gabrielle's bedroom.

As Gabby scrambled over to the same bench, Hermione sat up from her place on Gabby's bed and looked around. It took her a few seconds to properly restart her brain.

"Harry? What time is it?"

"Very, very late. Or I should say very early. You both should be sleeping right now."

"Couldn't sleep without you, Harry. The mermen might get me." Whether it was true or not, she believed they could get her.

"I'm terribly sorry Gabby, this would have been the first night I wasn't already in your dreams first. I forgot." Harry reached a hand out to run it through the girl's fine hair. He couldn't actually play with the hair itself, but his fingers did cause a bit of a tingle in her scalp. She began to giggle, but ended up yawning instead. "Go to bed Little Angel. I'll be with you shortly."

Now that Gabby had her Harry, she was finally willing to surrender herself to sleep. By the time she was under covers with head on pillow, her breathing was already starting to deepen.

"It's not fair, Harry. Why can't I snog you senseless? Why did you have to die?" Hermione was fighting sleep to be with the boy she loves.

"I'm a tragic hero, 'Mione. We're not allowed to have happy endings." Harry began to float over the bed. Whether Hermione was asleep or not, it would be time to say hi to Gabby soon.

"I don't believe in fairy tales, Harry. You are what you make of yourself." Her eyes were only half open.

"You don't believe in fairy tales? You are a witch, aren't you? Are you sure that there isn't a jolly old wizard living way up north who owns hundreds of house elves and casts charms on every child to know when they've been bad or good? He could be Lord Claus of the Ancient and Noble House of Claus or something." By the end of his response, Harry was whispering to her. Her eyes were almost closed.

"Saint Nicholas, Harry... he was... Bishop of... Turkey..." And she was out.

"Sweet dreams, Love." Harry smiled. Of course they would be. He'd be in them to make sure of it.

-o\O/o-

"Mione? 'Miiiiii-o-neeeeeee. Where did she go, Gabby?" Harry and Gabby were walking hand in hand between two rows of reference books in Hermione's library.

All he got in answer was giggling. That was his only answer until they reached the end of the row anyway. With Harry looking at Gabby's electric smile rather than where he was going, his attacker completely blindsided him.

"Hermmmiohhhhmmmm!" It was all Harry could get out while pinned against the shelves with Hermione's mouth covering his.

"Cooties! Harry's got cooties!" Gabby giggled and squeaked at the kissy-face she was given a front row seat to. "Har-ry and 'Mio-ne sit-in' in a tree! K-I-S-S-I-N-G!"

"Why didn't I think of this before! I love you, Harry! Love you, love you, love you!" Hermione had come up for air. Before her was a stunned and deliriously happy Harry. It wasn't enough to just say she loved him... Hermione wanted to show Harry, wanted him to feel it. Gabby sat in a nearby chair and watched.

Several lines were left uncrossed. Snogging was enough for now and Gabby didn't need an object lesson in human reproduction. She may be Veela, but she's a little Veela even by the standards of her race.

-o\O/o-

June 25th, 1995

While several young women slept the morning away in a maison-forte between Marseille and the French Alps, shock waves were just beginning to hit the homes of ordinary witches and wizards who were not witness to the Third Task of the Triwizard Tournament on Hogwarts grounds last night.

In London, in a dark and dank townhouse, the kitchen fireplace roared to life with green flames. Remus Lupin stepped out of the fire holding a new copy of the Daily Prophet under his arm.

"Sirius? Sirius!" Aside from a depressingly long row of open or empty liquor bottles, there was no sign of life. "Not today, Padfoot. You'll need your wits about you for once."

Remus banished some of the mess in the room as an afterthought as he moved to the staircase. The house was quiet. Even more than it used to be.

Sirius Black didn't handle his godson's death well at all.

The portrait of Walburga Black had been burned to ash even as it screamed bloody murder from the wall. They never could undo Kreacher's sticking charm, even after the little bastard signed his own death warrant by celebrating Harry's death and gloating about it. The house elf's head was removed from his neck seconds later.

The odious elf always dreamed of being beheaded, true, but he never would have wanted his remains tossed into a rubbish bin and sent to the nearest muggle waste disposal facility. Sirius's only regret was that he couldn't think of an even more muggle-ish end for the little shit.

After a short climb up the central stairs, Remus came to the proper landing and passed through the Master Suite's doors.

The stench. It was horrible.

More liquor bottles lined the floor, desk and the bedside tables. There were stains on the floor and bedding from where Padfoot's drinking had gone too far and made him sick. In the midst of it all was a ragged, bone thin grim sleeping off his last dose of oblivion.

Remus got to work. One cleaning charm after another. Banish. Polish. Refresh. Scour. Again and again. Sirius would need a bath along with whatever hangover cure could be found in the kitchen.

"Wake up, Padfoot! Big news today. You won't want to sleep through this one." The dog whined lightly but didn't stir. "Don't you want to hear the news about Harry?"

Growling, the dog moved both paws over its head. Remus shook his head slightly and moved next to the bed. There was no way around

it... Sirius would be waking up the hard way. Remus pulled the newspaper out from under his arm and rolled it tightly in his hand.

WHAP

The dog shook violently after catching a newspaper across the head. In short seconds, a ragged man lying in filthy robes replaced the dog. He was holding his head with both hands, mouth open in a silent scream.

"That'll teach you to drink your sorrows away! I told you to try relocating, but no! You couldn't be bothered to go any further than the cellar where your parents kept all the good stuff." Remus cast a handful of cleaning charms at his fellow Marauder. He would still need a shower and new clothes, but he wasn't death incarnate anymore.

"You sick bastard! What's wrong with you today? If I ever get rid of this sodding headache, you'll be in serious trouble. Watch your back, I mean it." Sirius had yet to open his eyes or peel his hands away from his forehead.

"Read the headlines, Padfoot. Triwizard ended last night and you will not believe what happened."

"That's it? Fucking Triwizard? You thought I'd want to hear about that? If Kreacher were still around, I'd have him throw your arse out." Sirius was experimenting with opening his eyes one at a time.

"Look at the paper, Sirius. It's Harry! Or more specifically, Harry's ghost." Remus carefully placed the paper in front of his friend so that the headlines and front picture were clearly visible.

HARRY POTTER the BOY WHO CAME BACK

Under this attention grabbing headline was a wizzarding photo. In that photo, something miraculous was happening over and over again. A dead transparent Harry Potter kept kissing a live opaque Hermione Granger as little Gabrielle Delacour reacts with wonder in the background. Never in the history of the wizzarding world has such an image ever been captured before. Almost as shocking was the next headline down.

POTTER TELLS LOVE TO LEAVE ENGLAND

If the violent triple-tie-with-triple-abduction end to the Triwizard Tournament weren't enough to dominate the news; if seeing proof of Harry Potter and Hermione Granger locked in a tragic romance didn't peak someone's interest; then their continued story of abuse of power, dementors and midnight international floo trips was bound to boil your cauldron. Let's not forget the Boy-Who-Came-Back saving not only the Girl-Who-Lived again but her mother and Beauxbatons Champion sister as well. Rita Skeeter struck the motherload last night.

By the time Remus returned from the kitchen with a hangover potion and a plate of eggs, Sirius had read all of the pertinent articles.

"You're right, Moony. It's time to relocate." Sirius slammed back the hangover potion as Remus set down the eggs.

"To France?"

"Oui." Hangover potion or not, the eggs tasted vile. How long were they in the cooler, anyway?

"Albus will not be happy."

"To Hell with him, then."

-o\O/o-

"Lavender? Parvati?" The two girls knew who was behind them, but they expected the Hufflepuff Champion to continue on down their table to speak to a Weasely or maybe a Seventh Year witch or three.

"Yes, Cedric?" Lavender fought down a blush. Injured Champions were hot.

"Do you know how late Hermione's going to be? I'd like to talk to her about last night." As the two girls looked at each other in 'realization', Cedric looked over to the Beauxbatons contingent sitting at the end of the Ravenclaw table. Fleur wasn't with her friends. Actually, he didn't see that brunette... Segolene... either.

"Is that why she never came back to the dorms last night? She was... she was with you?" Parvati tried to sound innocent in her query, but every nearby Gryffindor heard the accusation clearly.

"With me? No! I was in the Hospital Wing all night. I didn't see Hermione since before entering the maze." Cedric's brow creased. "What do you mean 'she never came back to the dorms last night'?"

"A good question, Mister Diggory." The Gryffindor Head of House was standing behind him carefully scanning her lions for any sign that one of them might know something.

Parvati piped up again. "Professor McGonagall. I don't know where Hermione went, but you should know, wherever it is, she took her things with her... all of them." Parvati hadn't really paid attention to the bare bed and missing student trunk during her morning routine, but then she wasn't totally awake yet at the time.

"Miss Weasley. Do you know where Miss Granger is this morning?"

Ginny was a mess. Her pony-tail wasn't orderly, there were rings under her eyes and her expression was one of misery. The witch in question looked over to Ron who, while not looking any worse for wear, did look as if he knew something.

"Miss Weasley, I need to know if Miss Granger is in need of assistance. Where is she?" Minerva had a bad feeling about the Weasleys being so hesitant. That is a trait they are not known for in the least.

"I expect she's being well taken care of Professor, but you won't be finding her today." Ginny knew she couldn't avoid these questions but she just couldn't volunteer the information.

"And why won't we be finding Miss Granger today, Miss Weasley?" Albus Dumbledore joined the Gryffindor Third Year's interrogation.

"B-because, Sir. She was targeted by the dementors last night. Harry wouldn't let her stay here anylonger. He sent her to France." There were several gasps and the rumor mill started cranking up to speed.

Cedric connected another dot in the picture that none of the others had put voice to yet.

"Is that why Fleur and Segolene aren't with the other Beauxbatons students? Did they leave together?"

Albus Dumbledore closed his eyes for a moment of reflection. Oh dear, what a mess it had all become. The Headmaster remembered watching Miss Granger walk with the Delacours to Hogsmeade, but thought little would come of it. How wrong he was to focus on Harry and the little Delacour witch.

Albus was also wrong to think it was nineteen eighty-one all over again. It was more like nineteen seventy-five. In the mid seventies, Voldemort's forces were well organized whereas Dumbledore's were not. Albus did not now have a Boy-Who-Lived tucked away where the Wizarding World could not touch him. He also did not have access to Voldemort's brother wand.

What did he have? Only questions without answers. This time, Albus promised to himself, he would have a backup plan ready in the event that whatever seemed to be his best hope failed again.

Before any more questions could be asked, the morning mail came swooping in on wing and talon.

"Sweet Merlin! Look at that!" Headmaster Dumbledore was about to call on the student who yelled out so abruptly when the entire Great Hall erupted with noise. Knowing that there could be no other reason for so many of his students to generate an uproar so quickly, he looked over a Third Year's shoulder to scan today's Daily Prophet.

The first headline was rather predictable to anyone who went down to the Third Task last night. But the accompanying photo and second headline... oh, my.

"Miss Weasley. Mister Weasley. You will accompany me and your Head of House to my office immediately. Bring your copy of the Prophet with you." Headmaster Dumbledore looked over to Minerva, who appeared rather flustered. "Professor McGonagall, please ask Professor Flitwick to maintain order in the Great Hall whilst we deal with more pressing issues."

-o\O/o-

Breakfast smelled wonderful to Fleur. That could only mean one thing. France.

"Good morning, Mother. I hope you are well this morning." The elder sister of the Delacour family slid gracefully into a seat at the family breakfast table.

"Me? You who fought off... I don't want to know what you fought off last night. To say nothing of those foul demons that Gabrielle and Harry took care of for us." Apolline set her fork down. "How are you, Princess?"

"Yes, my Princess, how do you fair on this lovely summer morning?" Segolene hugged Fleur from behind and bussed her cheek. Fleur flushed scarlet before picking out some fruit from a serving tray.

"Will you two please let that nick-name fade away? Gabby is so much more of a Princess than I ever was." Apolline raised a delicate eyebrow as Segoline snorted from the next chair over.

"Why Fleur, dear. Where do you think she got it from?" Segolene snickered at the motherly tone Apolline was taking. "You taught her too well. She makes none of your early mistakes. If she is not the little angel we take her for than it is because you taught her how to hide evidence of her misdeeds."

Fleur avoided eye contact with her mother. Apolline sighed.

"Well, your early tutelage combined with whatever she learns from dear Harry shall make us either terribly proud or terribly afraid of whatever she does with herself in the future."

As the lady of the house reached for a pitcher of milk, two owls flew through an open window. One carried a letter with Alain's office seal while the other carried a pair of newspapers. Apolline pushed the papers, one copy each of *Le Mystique* and the *Daily Prophet*, to the girls and took the letter for herself.

"Sweet Jeanne!" Segolene was the first to unroll this morning's *Daily Prophet*. "I don't know whether to laugh or to cry."

Apolline was too far into her husband's letter to look away but Fleur managed to pull her attention away from a picture of herself on the cover of *Le Mystique*. The French magical paper proudly displayed Fleur holding onto her injured fellow Champions with one hand while holding the Triwizard Cup in the other. Clearly the photo was taken immediately after they returned to Hogwarts grounds. As soon as Fleur looked over to the Prophet's cover, she was sure that both papers would have to be read cover to cover.

"Get cleaned up, girls. We'll be heading into your father's office as soon as we're ready. Little Angel and Hermione need to be ready as well." Neither girl bothered to point out that Segolene wasn't a Delacour as Alain has been her unofficial father for years.

Calls of 'yes, Mother' and 'yes, Auntie' the two teenaged witches each grabbed something from the table to eat while harassing their younger charges. Two steps away from the table, Fleur turned around and moved to fill a plate with pastries for the late sleepers. Segolene held onto her Prophet. She couldn't wait to see Hermione's reaction.

Two floors higher in the centuries old Delacour family seat, two girls continued to sleep comfortably despite the bright light filtering through centuries old leaded windows. Some of that light also filtered through Harry Potter.

The boy who died and came back was as close to being at peace as he's ever been since before his parents died. Why? Simple, really. He loved two girls; two girls that loved him back in equal measure.

Harry at first wanted to say that it was a different kind of love for each girl but was it? How could he tell?

Hermione was in his life since they were both First Years. He must have loved her since she was petrified in Second Year... or was it as early as the troll? Still he didn't know what it was he felt back then. Friendships seemed so much more important than the L-word before he learned that he was to face a dragon in the First Task. As much as he loved her, not once had he consciously made any romantic overtures towards his bushy-haired bookworm. Damn it to Hell.

He never loved Cho. Now that Harry looked back with perspective unique to the dead, he could see the crush for what it was. Cho was pretty... beautiful even, but he had nothing more than hormones directing him in her direction. Harry's life would have been so much simpler if he had just crushed on Hermione instead. His life would have been just as short, regardless. There was no way he was not bringing Gabrielle up from the lake bed.

Gabrielle. What a sweet, innocent, fun, talented little girl. She was living the childhood he never got to have for himself. He loved her so much. Is that love really so different than his love for Hermione? Forget hormones... forget snogging... forget, just for a moment, that he's dead. Both of those girls were sleeping in the same bed, right in front of him, right now. If he were alive today, could he forsake one for the other?

No. No, he couldn't. It would kill him to even try. Praise be to whatever god was listening that both girls were now under the same roof. It made watching them so much easier.

Harry would have sighed in contentment were he alive. Instead, he gazed happily at his girls without moving, just as he had been doing for over an hour.

Myrtle was right. Being a ghost can do wonders for your patience.

-click-

"Good morning, Fleur. Segolene." Harry rose to greet his visitors.

"Good morning, Harry." The two smiled and responded in stereo.

"Wish I could smell what's on that plate. It looks wonderful." Harry was too busy last night to miss eating or smelling or just about anything. He smirked to himself. Once the girls were asleep and dreaming, Hermione did her best to make him forget he was dead.

Apparently the smells and sounds of morning could do what the sun itself could not. Hermione began to stir.

"Oooooohhhh Harrrrry. Why couldn't we have done that before you died?" Hermione began to stretch and twist under the covers allowing one smooth leg to escape and draw Harry's eye.

If he had been paying attention, we would have seen the smiles worn by Fleur and Segolene get much bigger.

"And just what was it, 'ermione, zat 'e did to you while you were sleeping?" Hermione sat up and opened her eyes. How was she going to-

"They played kissy-face in Hermione's library! Harry's got girl germs now." Gabrielle didn't open her eyes. She did curl tighter around Hermione in an effort to get more comfortable.

"Her 'library'? Is that what they call it in England? How did you two figure out how to touch each other? Am I going to have to ask what your intentions are for Hermione, Mister Potter?" Fleur realized near the end that listening to Gabby caused her to slip back into French for a moment. She also realized by way of their guilty reactions that Gabby was right. How did Gabby know? Fleur and her mother would have to corner Gabrielle some time soon and ask a few questions.

"It was just snogging! Honest. Gabby was our minder the whole time. Look, given the chance, I'd love to be 'Mione's boyfriend but," He looked down at himself, "I missed the boat on that one, didn't I?"

"I wouldn't mind, Harry. Don't know what I'll tell Mum and Dad but... oh, Lord. Mum and Dad! I just ran off to France without them!" Hermione lost her dreamy smile.

"Don't worry, honey. Poppa Delacour will fix it. He's never let one of his girls down before." Segolene meant every word to Hermione. Alain has done as much for her in the past. More to the point, she meant to say it in French as a test. Harry hasn't asked anyone to repeat themselves yet this morning and he wasn't known for speaking the language.

Once again, the transparent boy didn't so much as bat an eyelash.

"Little Angel, Hermione. Apolline has asked that we get ready for a trip into the Ministry today. I suspect we will be spending the next several hours answering very boring questions about our very terrifying night."

Fleur set the breakfast tray down on a level section of bedding. "Eat up you two. I'll run a bath."

"And no bath for you, Harry Potter! You stay with us for the time being!" Segolene's jab left both Hermione and Harry blushing furiously and Gabby giggling about cooties. "By the way, lovebirds, I have something you'll want to see..."

With that, Segolene carefully unrolled her copy of the Daily Prophet and held it out for Harry and Hermione.

Hermione began choking on a bit of pastry she had unfortunately chosen to swallow just then. Harry instinctively went to slap her back, only to have his arm pass straight through back, breasts and everything in between.

"Oh! -cough- You don't un -cough- understand what this means! My parents!" Hermione held a hand over her mouth as she tried to regain control.

"What about your parents? We'll have to get in touch with them but Segolene already said Alain would help." Harry idly noted that Gabby was still coiled around Hermione and pretending not to be awake.

"Too late! As soon as I told my parents that the Prophet sometimes mentioned me, they insisted that I send home those editions that do mention me. After they saw the article about your will they had me get a subscription. They've already got a copy of this paper, Harry! They know!" She had that deer-in-headlights look in her eyes, the same look she gets when she just knows she failed a test even though she really got an O+.

"It'll be alright, 'Mione. I swear it!" Harry began to scramble for ideas to stop Hermione from joining him early just to hide from her parents. "Look, you and Gabby take your baths... and me and the girls here will go talk to Apolline. Okay?"

Hermione nodded. With a few pokes to a ticklish midsection, Gabby gave up her sleeping act and showed Hermione where the nearest bath was. They could deal with Hermione's parents later. It was past time to get ready for a new day.

End Chapter

Chapter Five: Prophets and Mystics

June 25th, 1995

Gabrielle sneezed.

Zoé the house elf was instantly on hand to add more fluffy towels to the pile around her little mistress.

"Merci."

"Your hair shines like liquid silver when it's wet, Gabby. I'm so jealous." Hermione spoke up while working out some tangles in her own hair.

Gabrielle just smiled. Her hair never tangled, but she knew that it would be wrong to say that. Momma has been teaching her how to say 'yes, I am a pretty Veela' without making other girls angry. Momma says it will be a very important skill one day.

"Fleur and Segolene say I have princess hair. I like having princess hair. It makes pretending to be a princess easy." Gabrielle saw Hermione smile despite having a bit of trouble with a bad tangle. "Can I untangle your hair? Fleur untangles Segolene's hair and then they splash around a lot. I know how, promise."

Gabrielle watched her new big sister think for a moment before nodding and turning to the side. She got to work. As little fingers began an assault on the wet brown mass flowing over Hermione's shoulder the older witch watched Gabby's eyebrows crease and the end of her tongue slide into view. This was Gabby's 'I'm concentrating' face. In much less time than Hermione expected it to take, Gabby cleared the knot and both girls had straight sheets of wet, clean hair. Well, not quite as wet as before. Zoé was seeing to that.

"Thank you Gabrielle. You did a wonderful job." Hermione saw the beaming eight year old and tried to show a smile of her own, but just couldn't do it. "I wish I could be so happy."

"Why are you sad, 'Mione?" Gabrielle was confused. They were home. Poppa and Harry would keep them safe. Why was she sad?

"I'm sorry, Gabby. It's just... my parents... and Harry's back, but he's a ghost... and then there are people in England that want to hurt me. They tried to hurt us last night." Hermione was beginning to tear up. Dementors were far worse than she would let on to Gabby. She didn't want to spoil Gabby's happy thoughts. "But you saved us, didn't you Gabby? We are all very proud of you."

"Harry and Poppa are good at saving girls. The best. You are safe with Poppa and Harry, 'Mione. And Poppa will fix it with your mamma and poppa too. He will." Gabrielle moved to sit in the larger girl's lap and gave Hermione a big hug. Hermione hugged Gabby back. "Not so tight! I have to go to the toilet."

-o\O/o-

Beep beep beep...beep beep... ...beep beep beeeep beep...
...beep beep beep beeeep.

Gabrielle watched Hermione hold the handset of a public phone to her ear and wait. Any minute now, Alain would come down from his office with a Ministry escort to bring everyone in to testify before the International Affairs and Law Enforcement Department heads.

Her Momma had brought all of them to a large, multi-story atrium on the ground floor of a rather busy government building near the Arc de Triomphe in Paris. This atrium was a mixed magical/non-magical entry point to various French Ministry of Magic departments. The space itself seemed an even mix of current and historical French architectural styles. Centuries old rose marble columns were separated by stainless steel balconies with brass trimmed glass guardrails and barriers. Centered in this rather artistic space was a spectacular sign with meter high letters focused on the words 'Le Ministère de la Magie vous accueille.' Hermione and Harry were both rather surprised by the welcome sign as it seemed to constantly demonstrate every form of magic one could imagine. Meter tall letters changed materials and fonts continuously. Magical lights, plants, animals and elements appeared, shifted and vanished in a beautifully choreographed dance. Hermione was doubly surprised to see non-magical equipment like computers and the phone she was now using liberally spread throughout the obviously magical room.

The explanation? Just because the British never put much time into magically shielding technology doesn't mean the rest of the world gave up with the idea. You could walk into a magical home in Norway, Mexico or Egypt and never once think a wizard lived there. To be fair, there were other countries behind the curve like England, but the number was dwindling every year.

"Come on, Mum... pick up the phone." Gabby may have used a phone once or twice, but she's never picked one up and dialed a number like Hermione was doing. She remembered hearing in school that sometimes you have to say your name if you call far away. Something about the other person promising to pay for it...

"Mum? Mum, calm down! Please, calm- I can't tell you if you don't- I'm safe now. In France. Yes. M-mostly true, Mum. Ahhhhh, well. That did happen. That's right, Mum. Er, yeah. We were."

Fleur and Segolene both discretely cast listening charms on the phone Hermione had in hand. If Hermione or her parents were going to be in trouble, they wanted to hear about it soon enough to help out. Harry drifted close enough to listen in on Hermione's side of the conversation.

"Yes, Mum. Yes, Harry saved me. No, it wasn't the first time Harry saved me. No Mum, it wasn't the first time he saved my soul from being eaten by demons. Almost the same thing happened last year. Yes Mum, we were on school grounds or in the castle every time. Yesssss... it was the first time he was dead when he saved me. Yes, Mum. Yes, I love him. Yes, Mum, I promise not to die just to be with him; I don't think it works that way. Cross my heart, Mum. Really." Hermione paused as her mother seemed to get distracted for a moment.

"Mum? Wait! Turn on your speakerphone before you answer the door, please. It's probably someone from Hogwarts as I ran from school before the end of term; they might pressure you into telling me to come back and I want to listen in. Alright, Mum." Hermione put her hand over the mouthpiece as to ensure a one way connection.

Moments before, Emma Granger was furiously scrubbing out a cast iron pot in her kitchen, desperately trying to pretend that nothing is wrong. Her sweet baby didn't almost get eaten by a demon last night. No, it didn't happen. Why won't this bloody burnt cheese give way?

The telephone began to ring.

Emma(1) was halfway to the phone before her cheese encrusted pot hit the floor, cracking the corner off of a ceramic floor tile.

"Hello?" Emma always told Daniel that becoming parents would be the death of them. She started taking the old joke seriously once an old Scotswoman arrived at their doorstep and boldly proclaimed that their precious little bookworm was a witch. An honest to God, broom flying, spell casting (don't forget stake burning) witch. Then there were the letters home about a troll or something in her first year at magical boarding school. She was joking right? In Hermione's second year, their girl had come down with some sort of magical illness that put her in the Hospital Wing for three weeks. So much for 'superior medical care'. How good could they be if it took as long as a muggle hospital visit to cure some sickness that Mrs. McGonagall assured her wasn't deadly? Hermione's letters home weren't nearly so descriptive after that. Not until Harry died. Harry died... and almost took Emma's daughter with him by grief alone.

"Baby? Is that you? Oh, thank God! You've given us quite a scare. Where are you? Are you hurt, dear? Where are you? France? The Prophet article is true, then? How true? What about... what about the picture? Harry's a ghost now? Did you... were you really attacked? And the bit in the paper about the little girl and Harry?" Hermione's father had gone into work, but Emma was staying home just in case Hermione tried to contact home.

Luckily for her Hermione did. Emma had a minute or two to conduct her interrogation before being interrupted.

-knock-knock-knock-

"Hold on, Sweetheart, there's someone at the door. What is it dear? But why dear?"

-knock-knock-knock-

"I'll put it on speakerphone... hold on, dear." The marginally less frantic woman pressed a button on her phone's base unit and walked through a cased opening into the Granger family's entry foyer.

"Yes?" Emma Granger opened her front door.

"Ah, Mrs. Granger. I am Albus Dumbledore, Headmaster of Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, may I have a moment of your time?" Hundreds of kilometers away, Hermione's eyes went wide. So did Fleur's. Apolline added her own listening charm to the phone.

"Please do come in. Would you like some tea?" Emma's ability to host tea parties with work associates served her well this morning as Albus did not detect any deceit or tension in her greeting.

"I must decline your generous offer as I have a very tight schedule this morning." Albus went as far as the center of Emma's foyer before turning to properly address her.

"Perhaps another time, then."

"Of course. But for now, I have a serious matter to discuss."

"Oh, dear. Is Hermione in the Hospital Wing again? Professor McGonagall promised that such things were not going to happen to my daughter again." Whether she chose to be honest with the Headmaster or not, motherly concern was easy to express.

"No, Mrs. Granger. Quite the opposite has happened... you see, Hermione has left Hogwarts grounds and was taken to France late last night."

"What? Taken to France?"

"I assure you that she is physically safe for the moment, but I fear for her mental state."

"I beg your pardon? For the moment? I want details, Headmaster."

"She was convinced by the Delacour family to leave England discreetly late last night. I'm afraid that I cannot provide more details than that as the matter is still under investigation."

"My daughter is in another country, Mister Dumbledore. You're going to have to do better than that."

"Mrs. Granger. I need to know if Hermione tries to get in touch with you."

"But why would the Delacours take her in the first place? She considered them to be very close friends."

"I have my suspicions. Your daughter has already been convinced to give the Delacours a wand that Minister Fudge declared a historic artifact. This wand was not the only item of Mr. Potter's that your daughter received in his will and you can now see what kind of target that makes her in the magical world."

"Right now I only have your word for all this, Headmaster. Why isn't one of those aurors here to see me. Can I get a magical paper? Surely an international abduction of this type is on the front cover."

"I'm here as your daughter's Headmaster and as a Ministry representative, Misses Granger. I hold a rather important office in the Wizengamot."

"What about that paper?"

"I'm sorry, but as this is a muggle household it is far too risky to leave a magical newspaper in your care." Albus took out a piece of parchment. "This parchment is charmed so that anything you write on it will be recorded on another parchment in my office at Hogwarts. It is urgent that you make use of it as soon as your daughter makes her presence known."

"You will be hearing from me and my husband soon enough, Headmaster. You can be sure of that."

"Thank you for your time, Madame. I assure you that I will do everything within my power to set things right again. Hermione will be home, happy and healthy quite soon. Good day."

"Good day, Mister Dumbledore." Emma watched the Leader of the Light calmly walk his fork tongued arse right out of her foyer and down the front walk.

-click-

"Mum?" Anyone watching in the atrium could see Hermione shiver from nerves and fear.

"Yes?"

"You don't believe him, do you?" Apolline and Alian whispered to each other, trying to decide if this conversation should be considered evidence in today's proceedings.

"While I've seen this Skeeter woman lie about you before, I didn't like what your Headmaster had to say. Not at all. Hermione, dear?"

"Yes, Mum?" Harry wanted to hold Hermione close and tell her that it would be alright. He needed to, but as a ghost his hands were tied until she turned in for the night. Harry began to see a potential flaw in the 'be Hermione's ghost boyfriend' scenario that the two of them were so eager to explore last night.

"The Headmaster is out on the lawn, waving his wand about. What's he doing?"

"Mother said that Headmaster Dumbledore is on her lawn with his wand out. He's casting something. Can he do that?" Hermione's general question was answered by Alain.

"It's probably illegal, but who's going to accuse him? They'll say your parents should feel honored to have wards cast on their home by such a famous wizard. They will likely be wards to alert him of your return home."

"Mum. He's probably casting wards to catch me if I come home or something. We can't do anything about it either. Look, I have to go, Mum." Alain was tapping his watch in front of Hermione.

"What- why?"

"The French Ministry of Magic is interested in what happened to us last night. French citizens almost lost their souls on English soil. Their Champion was kidnapped. I have to testify... look, I'm being told I have to hang up, Mum. I'll call again when I can. I'll write too. Give my love to Dad."

"I love you, Hermione, dear."

"Love you too, Mum." As soon as Hermione hung up the phone, Fleur and Segolene jumped in to give comfort and support. She was given a five minute reprieve when Alain discovered that several Ministry wards directed towards ghosts would have to be modified to give Harry free passage. As he was a star witness, they were not about to leave him behind.

That night in Hermione's dreams, Harry and Gabby both did their best to distract Hermione, but she was afraid. The Ministry of Magic had her home address. Dumbledore had already made a personal house visit. What if Delores Umbridge also chose to visit the Granger residence? Worse yet, what if she sent ministry 'representatives' on an errand just as she must have done the night of the Third Task? Really, who else could have controlled the dementors that way? Minister Fudge asked Umbridge where the dementors were and what they were doing. Umbridge knew the answers. Who's to say she couldn't send the soul suckers on a little stroll through Kent... If she were willing to have a witch 'accidentally' kissed, then what of two muggles? It would be even easier wouldn't it?

Harry and Gabby did everything they could to comfort the distraught girl, but in the end, all they could do was wait for morning and hope that the elder Delacours would have sound advice.

-o\O/o-

Le Mystique

26 june 1995

POTTER APPEALS TO FRANCE

Friends, Parisians, countrymen, lend me your ears. In a series of secure and restricted interviews, officials from the Department of Magical Foreign Affairs and the Department of Magical Justice both sat down to hear testimony from members of the Delacour family, Beauxbatons student Segolene Royal (17), Hogwarts student Hermione Granger (15) and the ghost of Harry Potter (d.14). Sources present during the testimonies confirmed previous reports of a dark plot to kidnap the winning Triwizard champion, a dementor

incident and an English witch's flight from the British Isles by order of the boy she loves. The dead boy she loves.

Granger swore under oath that four dementors approached her, Royal and the witches of the Delacour family acting consistently with dementors on the hunt. How would a fifteen year old know, you ask? She swore by her magic and her life that she and Potter were both nearly kissed by dementors at least twice on Hogwarts grounds last year during the hunt for Sirius Black. Potter himself was approached by dementors not less than four times. Potter agreed with all of Granger's statements. While Potter did testify willingly, he was unable to swear a magically binding oath due to his deceased state.

Potter's personal testimony included an appeal to the French Ministry of Magic for protection of the two witches who share his heart between them. As reported before, Granger and Potter are the most tragic lovers from the British Isles since Morgana and Merlin. Both witch and ghost admitted before witnesses that they did not admit their love for each other or kiss before his death. The photo below, courtesy of Bozo Scherzen, is not only the first ever captured kiss between living witch and spirit, but also the First Kiss of a romantic nature for both subjects. And he loves a second? Once you hear who, you can only agree with Potter.

In a shocking admission, Potter confirmed much of the legend behind Potter's Mark. Moments before dying in the Second Task of the Triwizard Tournament, Potter willingly sacrificed himself in a heroic effort to save Gabrielle Delacour(8). Hear the explanation in his own words, "I knew I was dying. I could feel it. And then I remembered that I was not alone, that there was this sweet innocent little girl hurt just as I was and dying as well. I couldn't just give up so I tried with my last breath to do for Gabrielle what my mother is said to have done for me. I loved her. I gave her everything, my heart, my life and my magic... I pushed all of it into a kiss on her forehead hoping that she might survive somehow." When asked if his kiss matched the now famous kiss shaped mark on Delacour's forehead he said it did. Delacour repeated her admonition that Potter saved her life and would not credit Headmaster Dumbledore nor Headmistress Maxime for their efforts. Due to her age, it was agreed by the Ministry panel that she not take a magical oath to support her statements.

Why do Gabrielle Delacour and Hermione Granger need France's protection? The dementor assault was no accident. Granger provided written evidence in the form of letters from the Under-Secretary to the British Minister for Magic, Delores Umbridge. These letters demanded Granger surrender Potter's wand to the Minister for Magic's office. Granger sent the wand by owl to the youngest Delacour instead. In later letters, Umbridge makes several prejudiced comments and claims that Granger will suffer the dementor's kiss should she fail to submit. Granger also stated that in a private meeting with Albus Dumbledore, the Headmaster advised her that the Minister's office had no legal right to seize Potter's wand.

Potter supported Granger's decision to send his wand to France by explaining how Gabrielle defended her family on the night of the Third Task. "I couldn't say if it was accidental magic or something more, but Gabby held my wand and cast a patronus which took my form. In fact, I was the center of that spell. Apolline (Delacour, 37) says I saved her family. I say Gabby did. If she didn't have my wand... if she didn't cast a spell that night then five witches would have been kissed by dementors." Of the five witches nearly kissed that night, four of them were French citizens. What does Potter mean when he claims to be the 'center' of a spell? He refused to comment further. Perhaps the living are not meant to know such details about the dead.

Magical citizens of France. Do we do as Harry Potter asks and protect two girls who own this famous ghost's heart or do we leave them to the hands of fate and the British Ministry of Magic? Write The Mystic at our Paris Office with your opinion.

For a history of the Delacour family, see page 8.

For a history of Harry Potter, see page 9.

For more on dementors, see page 14.

Apolline looked up from her morning paper to hoping to see her husband or Hermione. She had found the two and Harry at the breakfast table earlier in the morning discussing the Grangers and what could be done to help their situation. An idea was hatched by the young British witch that seemed to be worth pursuing, so the small war party chose to retire to the one room in this structure which would help their plans along.

Beep beep beep...beep beep... ...beep beep beep beep...
...beep beep beep beep.

Here in the Delacour family's most secure property, one room was set aside for non-magical technologies and shielded against the wards. Their other properties were mostly a mix of magical with shielded electronics. Two rental properties outside of France were magically inert.

None of that mattered to Hermione right now, though curiosity would get the better of her after her main concern was taken care of.

"Mum?"

-o\O/o-

Albus Dumbledore sat majestically in his chair in the Great Hall of Hogwarts sipping his morning tea. Considering recent events, he thought it pertinent to take every meal with the students so long as his schedule permits. Perhaps a conversation between friends or some owl post to one of these future leaders of Magical Britain would be the key to Voldemort's final defeat. Such a boon would be far preferable than trying to forcibly extract key figures from distant shores.

Albus mentally reminded himself to draft a letter to the International Confederation of Wizards requesting extradition. It would be a third or fourth option at best, but having the document written ahead of time would help in the long run. Even charming Miss Granger's parents directly would be preferable no matter how distasteful. Magically tampering with British muggles would be both an internal affair and easy to conceal.

Owls began to appear. First it was just one or two... the faster breeds. Soon dozens of owls passed through the Great Hall's clerestory windows with scrolls, envelopes and newspapers in claw and beak. Albus himself took a copy of the Prophet, ready to filter through the disinformation to glean new insight into Fudge's initial smear campaign against the Delacours, when a second owl carrying the Prophet landed before him.

"Ah! You see, my feathered friend, that I already have a copy of the Prophet. You may be mistaken as to your delivery route." The bird didn't move, not that he expected it to. Owls don't make mistakes such as this. He passed his wand over the bird and cast a charm or two to make sense of this avian riddle before him.

"Oh, dear. Most unexpected." Albus creased his brow in thought.

"What, Headmaster, is 'most unexpected' if I may ask?" The old man was so deep in thought that he had forgotten about having company at the Staff Table and quickly thought of a cover to distract his Deputy Headmistress.

"Nothing to worry about, I assure you. I should have expected Miss Granger's daily paper to be delivered to her Magical Guardian when she herself was out of reach. I suppose I shall just have to cancel her subscription until such a time as she returns." Albus saw that while still skeptical, Minerva was not going to make an issue of it. Perhaps a slight distraction is in order. "How are your lions taking her disappearance?"

"Most only whisper rumor and gossip. Only the Weasleys show any real reaction and Ginny is chief among them. Hermione was always closer to Harry than anyone else, even young Ronald."

"We shall see. Miss Granger is unlikely to drop out, not with her grades. She can only hide from the future for so long." Albus would reconsider the Granger problem at a later date. For now, he had students to supervise and secret meetings to arrange. His old friend Alastor Moody was officially missing now and that meant that his little club was short a second-in-command.

The students before him were an excited lot for the most part as this was the last weekend before the end of term. Many students were getting lax in their studies in favor of making plans for the summer holidays with friends and family.

Two groups of students were still more somber than the rest; those from Beauxbatons and Durmstrang. The wizards of Durmstrang were quiet and defensive, just as they had been since their Champion was grievously wounded and their Headmaster disappeared unexpectedly. Albus was told to expect the Deputy Headmaster and a Bulgarian Ministry official to appear on Monday

or Tuesday to regain control of their students. Victor was still recovering in the Hogwarts Hospital Wing in part to give the other Durmstrang students a chance to visit with him and to help him recover before the journey home. The witches of Beauxbatons were full of nervous activity. Being far more active than their Bulgarian counterparts yet at the same time far less positive... well, the Hogwarts staff was getting curious even with Madame Maxime's occasional non sequiturs and distracting questions about their teaching techniques.

Madame Maxime may have been capable of distracting the Head of Ravenclaw House, but she was unable to keep Ravenclaws themselves from listening in to hushed conversations in French. One claw finally managed to snag a copy of *Le Mystique* from the girls in blue.

While gossip didn't spread nearly as fast in Ravenclaw as it did in the other houses, it still spread. An interview with Potter's ghost and a Potter legend unknown in England were two items that could not be suppressed by Madame Maxime or her girls any longer. The direct accusation of attempted murder against Under-Secretary Umbridge was like spilling oil on a fire. Claws translated the paper to their fellow claws. Lions and puffs overheard the conversations and amplified the rumor mill. Snakes went right to their claw associates or to whichever French student looked the most approachable. The young men of Durmstrang stayed out of it for rumors did not make Victor recover any faster.

"Miss Chang." The claws near Cho went silent as did several lions and puffs nearby.

"Yes, Headmaster?"

"I'd like a look at that paper if you don't mind."

"Not at all Headmaster." As one of the most popular Hogwarts witches and a rather intelligent lass to boot, she was by default one of the claws who managed to get a copy of *Le Mystique* in front of her. Or rather, she did until Headmaster Dumbledore relieved her of her copy. Soon every Head of House and most other Professors either had a copy of the *Mystic* or a member of the student body reporting on the paper's contents. Olympe didn't need one as her own early edition was delivered before breakfast in the carriage.

"Why Olympe, my dear... you have been keeping secrets from us." Albus used a playful tone. No need to scare away his fellow school head.

"Not actively Dumbly-dorr.(2) We simply 'eld to national lines when discussing ze news. When were you going to inform me zat I was a dark creature and zat ze 'alf-breed Veela Delacour family was preparing to sacrifice ze virginal Mademoiselle Granger to resurrect ze Dark Lady Jeanne d'Arc? Should I 'ave my girls read zat Prophet article? You zink zey will like it? Gabrielle is surrounded wiz loving family and her condition leaves her wiz no ill effects. 'arry Potter chooses to stay wiz 'er and 'o am I to argue? Ze little angel is a student in our école élémentaire program. She is a primary school student and far too young to receive ze kind of attention you English 'blessed' your own Boy-'o-Lived wiz. We take care of our own." Olympe held firm.

Albus internally regretted the scandal driven nature of the Prophet. At first, the shocking scandal of the Third Task lent itself to an almost pro-Delacour paper. Then the real scandal mongers in the Minister's office got involved and you would think that Saint Cedric only just saved Victor's 'miserable drug fueled existence' from the 'Demon Siren of Marseille'. Direct quotes from today's Prophet, the both of them. Apparently Fleur summoned her Hell spawned slaves to assault the general public and Miss Granger sacrificed her own freedom to block the ritual from ending properly. The fork-tongued junior miss demoness Gabrielle simply took credit for saving the day after enslaving the weak willed and naïve spirit of Harry Potter. This is the 'truth' as told by Rita Skeeter. If only so many students in this very room didn't openly favor that interpretation despite witnessing events directly. Oh, well... if it got him Miss Granger and Mister Potter any faster, he could work with it. Perhaps he could 'turn' the 'dark tendencies' of the youngest Delacour if she attended Hogwarts rather than Beauxbatons. It was an unlikely scenario, but he owed it to the Greater Good to plot it out at the very least.

"Mister Potter is clearly attached to Miss Granger who has yet to take her O.W.L.s and will not simply abandon her own parents. Your 'little angel' lays claim to an English national treasure... two if you count Harry himself as a treasure and not a sentient being. As the Headmaster of this school, the Chief Warlock of our Wizengamot and the Supreme Mugwump of the International Confederation of

Wizards, it is clearly within my prerogative to guide stray sheep back to the flock."

"I am but a mere headmistress. You will have to take up your issues with other department officials, Dumbly-dorr." Albus may have mistaken her expression as relief to have the lesser title and influence. For her part, Olympe would find it difficult to wait for Hermione to write out her transfer papers. Perhaps she should call in a favor or two and study the political asylum angle. Oh, what a spectacular headline that will be one day soon! Dark Lady d'Arc indeed. Bastards.

-o\O/o-

"Yes, thank you, Mum. You too, Dad. Please be careful. Yes. I- I love you both. B-bye." Hermione put down the receiver. She didn't cry, but she wanted to.

They had a plan now. Hopefully her Mum and Dad would be unmolested long enough to use it.

Hermione would see her parents nearby in Marseille, hopefully in a week's time. In a way, their escape plan was no different than the family Holiday already scheduled. The Granger family already planned on taking a trip this summer to the French Riviera; this would not change. Hopefully the Grangers would be able to retrieve some of their deposits on rental properties, as they were now to be the guests of the Delacours. Daniel and Emma would be given a choice between two family chateaus or a townhouse rent free. Apolline and Alain quietly discussed the possibility that it may be a more long term arrangement, but one could hope the Grangers' lives would not be so disrupted as that.

-o\O/o-

June 28th, 1995

After a Sunday spent together doing as much female bonding as possible, the extended Delacour household prepared for the remaining school year which only extended four days to July first. Segolene's mother Marie came over for several hours to cry on her daughter's shoulder and fuss over Gabrielle. Professors were allowed to check in on their students at home, were they not? As

Apolline took her morning meal, she considered what her family would be doing for the next week or so. Gabby would see her little friends again and hopefully begin to feel a bit more normal. As normal as an internationally famous eight year old can be, at least. Fleur and Segolene would return to Beauxbatons for some last minute N.E.W.T. studies before any of their Champion Candidate friends came back from Scotland. Hermione would be allowed to accompany the two older teens, giving her a chance to familiarize herself with the school and school library she hoped to spend the rest of her magical education in. Harry would... well, Apolline didn't know what he would do, but she was sure he would do something. Harry didn't seem the type to just stay in one house or one room all summer long whether alive or dead.

Apolline set down her morning paper. Next to it was post from friends, family, associates and the press. She and her family were now in the social and political spotlights of much of magical Europe. While this is not unheard of for the Monsieur and Madame of the house, what's different is the focus on their children and current young guests.

Twenty requests for interviews arrived for the Triwizard Champion alone. At least a dozen magical companies have offered generous contracts for Fleur to act as a representative, spokesmodel or similar employee so they can use the Veela Champion in their ad campaigns. There were also two respectable offers for her to model at more successful fashion houses. Not one Betrothal Contract made it past the ward line so a final tally there couldn't be guessed at. She also received nearly two hundred letters from friends and classmates who either wished to congratulate her for her success, express their sympathies about her abduction and/or ask her out. Fleur would get no rest between now and her N.E.W.T. exams; exams which were to be conducted during the second week of July.

Segolene enjoyed taunting Fleur about her fame right up to the point where Apolline dropped a stack of letters in front of the way too perky brunette. Nine interview requests, two spokesmodel contracts and about fifty letters from friends and classmates. Not bad considering her most famous family member not named Delacour was entrenched in the non-magical world as a representative in the National Assembly. She wondered if any of those annoying fires at the ward line were meant for her.

Apolline's Little Angel. The Girl-Who-Lived. The Veela child with Potter's Mark. Alain was carefully screening post for his youngest and would hand her a letter or two per hour on average. Gigi and Aimee both demanded in writing that Gabby return to school before summer. It was boring without her. Alain once mentioned that Gabby was receiving more post than her sisters combined. Yes, he included both Segolene and Hermione in that statement.

And Hermione was getting post. Alain was screening hers as closely he was Gabby's as no one knew what to expect in the post for the Girl-Who-Fled. She was the recipient of a relatively small stack of letters for interviews, emotional support and a query from Professor McGonagall that all managed to survive Monsieur Delacour's screening process.

-o\O/o-

"Momma. How do I look?" Gabrielle spun in place in her light blue school uniform allowing an inch or two more of her white cotton socks to show than usual. While her uniform was cute, even stylish, she would have to get on a swing or run at a full sprint to expose her knees. Harry clapped for his pretty princess.

"You wear it well, as always." Apolline came up behind her daughter and made a last minute adjustment of her uniform hat to fit just so. "So... have you remembered what is different about today?"

"Yes, Momma. I'm taking Harry to meet my friends." Gabby smiled at Harry and he winked back.

"Don't forget, you must ask permission from Professor Royal."

"She told me it was okay yesterday." Pout, pout, pout.

"She said that she would look into it, not that it was okay. There are wards on the school to keep spirits out, you know." Alas, Momma was building up immunity to her pout. Gabby would have to work harder next time.

"Sorry, Momma. But... but how will Harry go with me if we don't know?"

Apolline gave the girl a little kiss on the head. Right there. "Can't he go back 'Inside' as you call it? You said he came 'Outside' before."

Gabby's eyes lit up. So did Harry's. "Ohhhhhhh. Thank you, Momma. Love you."

"I love you as well, Gabrielle. Now off you go." Momma waved to her Little Angel.

Little Angel smiled at her Momma and waved back before opening her arms to Harry. Harry immediately moved to Gabby. About a half step before reaching her open arms, the boy vanished. Gabrielle pulled her arms in close and began to shake. Harry's parting wave took the form of gooseflesh down Gabby's neck and shoulders.

"Stoppit! That tickles! Teee-he-he-he-he-he-snort-ha-ha-ha!" Gabby took a moment to scratch her forehead. "I'll miss you, Momma! Goodbye!"

Little Angel finally had everything she needed and stepped up to the fireplace. Grabbing a pinch of floo powder, she turned one pointed finger at her own chest and boldly declared, "This time, let me do it Harry. You always come up short."

Apolline put a hand over her mouth as Gabby threw the floo powder into the fire. It took her seven whole years longer than Gabby to say those words to a boy and the situation was completely different. Apolline just had to drop that one into a pensive. Someone's getting embarrassed at her wedding reception one day.

The petit silver-blond student yelled, "Joliebatons Academie!" and followed the words with a leap worthy of anyone who's spent half her life practicing ballet. That's four whole years.

-o\O/o-

"And here we have our library." Segolene opened an ornate gilt door, one of a pair, to allow Hermione entrance into the Beauxbatons knowledge repository. Hermione's eyes widened just as they had each time she was introduced to a new section of the French school of magic. While Beauxbatons did qualify as a castle, the word palace might be more appropriate.

Hermione was quite impressed.

"This looks like something Louis the Fourteenth would have liked." Hermione was heard to murmur as she stepped into the two story space. Fleur smirked.

"'e would and 'e did. Our castle looks like a close cousin to the Château de Versailles , does she not?"

"What? You mean he was here?" World history brought to life. Hermione was eating out of Fleur's palm.

"More than that. 'e planned and payed for it all!" Fleur waved her hand to encompass the whole room yet intending the move to encompass their campus. "While ze Sun King was not magical 'imself, a cousin of 'is was found to be a witch. 'e became a patron and benefactor to Magical France just as 'e was to the arts of his non-magical subjects. In return, we may have added a decade or two to his lifespan and therefore his reign."

As Fleur and Segolene led an excited and gaping Hermione through her informal orientation, dozens of younger witches could be seen gaping back. None of those witches expected to see their Champion return to Beauxbatons grounds unless it was as a new Assistant Professor. More than a few girls were willing to bury years of jealousy of the fantastically good looking Veela for national pride. Not only was Miss Delacour walking the halls, but she had Miss Royal and -gasp- Harry Potter's lover, Hermione Granger, with her! Talk about gossip gold!

-o\O/o-

"Good morning, class."

"Good morning Professor Royal." Sixteen students called out together.

"I see Gabrielle is back from abroad. Welcome home, Miss Delacour."

"Thank you, Professor Royal." Several little giggles broke out. Everyone knew that the Delacours and Royals were close and it was fun to watch the two play 'I don't know you' every day. Everyone also

knew that Gabby was not given special treatment; any time she did something wrong, she would be corrected like any other student.

A hand came up.

"Yes, Miss Delacour?"

"May I invite my friend Harry to class, Professor Royal?"

Marie Royal hesitated before answering. As much as she thought it would be a good learning experience for the children, the professor knew that her school was as well warded as Beauxbatons was.

"While the class could use a good lesson on spirits, I am afraid that our school wards would stop Mister Potter at the gates and magical entry foyer."

"But... but if he got past the gates... if he got into this room... would he be okay?"

"No ghost has slipped through school wards before, Miss Delacour, but if Mister Potter could pull off the feat then I would be happy to host him for a day."

Gabrielle's smile lit the room. While fifteen other eight and nine year olds plus her professor watched in confusion, Gabby closed her eyes and bonked herself on the head twice with a balled fist.

"Knock, knock! Harry! Come outside and play!" Much to the amazement of her class, the spirit of Harry Potter materialized to the left of Gabby's desk.

At a professional level, Marie was a bit disturbed at his success. She would have to point out to the school Headmaster that there may be a weak point in the ward scheme.

"Hello! I hope I'm not disturbing anyone." After introducing himself, Harry thought for a moment that perhaps some of these children may not be as good with English and he knew Gabby and Professor Royal were. "Sorry. I should have said 'Hello! I hope I'm not disturbing anyone.'"

"Welcome to our class, Mister Potter. I'm sure the class has some questions... we'll stick to polite questions... and then perhaps you could help me teach the class about multiplication today."

"I'd be delighted."

-o\O/o-

July 2nd, 1995

When Cedric Diggory walked into the Great Hall for today's Leaving Feast, the first thing he noticed was the banners and drapes which decorated the walls and ceiling.

Black. It was all black.

The Triwizard Champion, or Triwizard Survivor as he preferred to call himself to those who asked about his 'victory', took a seat at Hufflepuff table quietly as did most of the students who were filtering in. In a show of diplomacy, he chose to sit halfway down the table, leaving a sizable length between himself and Cho Chang's normal seat.

He wouldn't want his back to her this evening, not after their talk last night. Cho was shocked into silence for the first minute of Cedric's 'we need to talk' heart-breaker. When panic did win out over shock, her half moaned declaration of love cut him deep, but did nothing to change his course. For half an hour, Cho tried again and again to make the Hufflepuff seeker change his mind. She went so far as to imply just how 'appreciative' she would be that very night if he would just promise to 'sleep on it'. When even that desperate tactic failed to win him over, scorn beat down shock and panic to rule the next hour of public arguments and near hexings that kept Cedric from reaching his House Common Room. By the time he finally did escape her wrath, threats of cutting of his other head and stuffing it down 'that Veela whore's throat' were echoing down the halls of Hogwarts.

That was last night. Now, less than a day later, Cedric was hoping that he would not get a curse in the face for his actions. Luckily for him, harsh looks from Ravenclaw and taunts from the Slytherin Table to his back were at a minimum and were easily shrugged off.

After some harmless small talk with the third and fourth years who had given their House hero a warm welcome, he ate.

The food tasted every bit as good as it did for the other five Leaving Feasts Cedric experienced, but there was a sadness in the room that seemed to take the fun out of it for everyone. Everyone except for many of the Slytherins anyway. Not that he looked, but the Third Year witch sitting opposite him was only too happy to report on the smug grins that graced many student's faces from the openly dark families.

While the Great Hall had been subdued during the bulk of the Leaving Feast, the room still grew silent as Albus Dumbledore rose from his seat at the center of the staff table.

"The end... of another year." Albus swept the room with his gaze. There is much that I would like to say tonight, but first I must acknowledge those who are not in this room. I would like for you all to please stand and raise your glasses with me. To Harry Potter." (3)

Nearly the entire hall did as asked. With benches scraping against stone, most of the hall stood with raised glass and repeated, "To Harry Potter."

Cedric noticed a few of his housemates glaring at a point further down the Slytherin Table behind him. It didn't take any leap of logic to infer that certain young snakes had refused to toast the lost son of Gryffindor.

"Mister Potter was a brave young man struck down in a most tragic accident. This was not the first time he made a supreme sacrifice to save the life of an innocent. You all know of the tragedy which took his parents while giving England its freedom from Voldemort, " Albus had to pause to let the gasps of the audience lessen, "but how much of his story is mere rumor? Considering the closeness between them, it should come as no surprise to any of you here today that when Professor Quirrel yelled out that a troll was loose in the castle, a young Harry and his close friend Ron Weasley ran to Hermione Granger's side and saved her from the angry troll which had trapped her in a water closet. With less than a year's magical instruction between them, the two boys showed Gryffindor courage enough to defeat a troll even before Professors could reach them.

"In his second year here at Hogwarts, Harry again risked his own life to save a young witch who had been secreted away to the legendary Chamber of Secrets. Even separated from his two closest friends, Harry managed to kill an ancient beast and rescue Ginny Weasley."

Halfway down the Gryffindor Table, sobs could be heard. Ginny didn't want to interrupt but it hurt so much to be reminded that her personal savior, the boy she intended to marry one day, was dead.

"When Harry Potter's name came out of the Goblet of Fire, I was as upset as any of you were. We now know that even then we were not as upset as Harry himself. It shames me to admit I believed him capable of tricking the Goblet of Fire. I would never have suspected him if the boy hadn't been so good at defying the odds in the three years previous. I now know he was innocent, but that gives me little comfort. Someone put Harry Potter's name in the goblet planning on sending the young Gryffindor to his death... and tragically, they were successful. Before a crowd of more than a thousand wizards and witches, Harry made the ultimate sacrifice and saved one more young witch at the cost of his own life.

"I ask you to judge Harry Potter, not by what is written about him in newspapers or books by people who have never met him, but by your own memories." Of course, by mentioning newspapers, he was guaranteeing that they would read the Daily Prophet anyway. It was no accident that he chose to say nothing either for or against Gabrielle.

"But Harry Potter is not the only student who is missing from out feast tonight. Please raise your glasses again for Victor Krum."

"Victor Krum." Once again the students stood... all of them this time... and rumbled out the name of a Champion.

"Madam Pomphrey and her colleagues from Saint Mungo's were able to treat the worst of the Bulgarian Champion's injuries before he and his countrymen returned to Durmstrang two nights ago. With a bit of luck and a great deal of effort, he may one day take to the air again." Scattered applause met the Headmaster's declaration.

"All four Champions were scarred to some extent by this year's Triwizard Tournament and it warms my heart to think that the three surviving Champions chose to touch the Triwizard Cup together in

honor of Harry Potter. The tournament's aim was to further and promote magical unity and understanding. In the light of what has happened this year such ties are more important than ever before."

As the Headmaster looked across the Great Hall, he noticed the looks that some of the easily swayed Hogwarts students, even a professor or two, were giving the remaining Beauxbatons students. He also noted the troubled expression of the Beauxbatons Headmistress who found herself unable to go to her girls directly. Even their unofficial student leader for the trip, Miss Delacour, was not around to take the focus directly and spare her classmates the glares of hundreds of angry English boys and girls. The witches in blue had good cause to be nervous as Slytherin House as a whole had been lobbying both Ravenclaw and Hufflepuff to believe the words of the Prophet which had gone from crucifying the Delacour family in print to implying that the dark tendencies were more widespread. Cedric found himself spending every second of time not eating defending the Veela, her school and her country. Cho played the part of a woman scorned to perfection by becoming the Prophet's most vocal supporter in the house of intelligence and research. Cedric thought it was more than a little ironic that her argument was based solely on emotion and never quoted any verifiable facts or statistics. Gryffindor threw their weight behind Cedric and Fleur as much as they could, for the house of lions had taken great pride in seeing Hermione almost take Harry's place amongst the surviving Champions. The lions had also begun to realize that if the Prophet could be so wrong about one of their own, then maybe they could be wrong about other things too.

Albus would make no offer of sanctuary to foreign students. They would not believe him. There would be no warning of dark times. While Albus and Severus knew of the Dark Lord's return, none here would accept his claims without proof and many would deny him even if he had proof. The Champions didn't stay in the graveyard trap long enough to witness anything useful. England was now facing dark and difficult times and both the Ministry and the people were completely unprepared.

"Remember the lessons Harry Potter has tried his whole life to teach us. Remember that there will come a time when you have a choice between doing what is right and what is easy. Remember a wizard who could have returned to his dormitories rather than save a witch from a troll. Remember a wizard who could have stayed where

suspicious eyes could see him rather than sneak off to face a basilisk and protect an innocent girl. Remember a wizard who took a spear in the chest rather than let go of an eight year old witch who was the true target of such violence. Remember Harry Potter."

Many students took many different lessons home with them from the Headmaster's speech. Whether it was by accident or design, the one 'lesson' which reached the Daily Prophet was simple: The savior of the Wizarding World, Harry Potter, would still be alive today if it weren't for Gabrielle Delacour.

-o\O/o-

"Are the students away, Minerva?"

Minerva McGonagall nodded curtly. Albus took this as his opportunity to indulge in one of his few real yearly rituals no matter what the Prophet has to say otherwise. He pulled a bottle of Odgen's Finest out of his desk along with a larger than normal crystal chalice. This year more than any other, he wanted to drink his troubles away. This year more than any other, this old defender of the Greater Good needed to finish the night sober.

"Have you made your decision, Albus?" When he looked up, he could see no clue to her emotional state or the subject she chose to breach. There were a lot of decisions he made every day as a Headmaster and he was quite sure he wouldn't have to make another for at least an hour or two.

"Pray tell, dear witch, what decision are you inquiring about tonight now that all of the students and a good deal of the staff have left for the summer?"

"My mistake then. I was sure from your pointed speech to the student body that you valued your memories of this recent year. I shall ask more clearly then," Albus looked on in surprise as the old Scotswoman built up her resolve and added some righteous anger to the mix. "Will you continue to keep me on as your Deputy Headmistress and Professor of Transfiguration... or will you retain the services of Severus Snape? You get no other choices, Headmaster."

Albus openly gaped at his Deputy. Was she truly serious? He knew for a fact that the dear woman loved Hogwarts like a daughter and every single student was like a grandchild.

"Is there no other way, Minerva? Who will care for the students as you have these many years? Who will look after your lion cubs?"

"Obviously you will not! Severus Snape is a worthless bastard, this is clear enough to any who meet him but for a minute or two. It took how long?... almost my entire life... from the time that I was a student in these halls myself for me to discover that you are also a worthless bastard." Albus was shocked beyond words. "Now I see that Severus must go and so must you. But that won't happen, will it? You have what you want in this office... you mold the students to your personal view of the Greater Good. But you know what? I see your Greater Good clearly now and it's rubbish. As much as I love this school and as much as I love these students, I will not sit by your side and play the part of your obedient sheep hound any longer."

Minerva tossed a wax sealed parchment onto the Headmaster's desk.

"That is my resignation. I have already signed it... I knew what your response would be. Do not seek to contact me in the future. Do not tell anyone that I would have supported one of your ideas as you should now take it as a general rule that I would go against any initiative you propose. If anyone asks why I resigned, I will tell them the truth in it's entirety. I will never forgive you for what you have done to the children under your supervision and I can only pray that you stay your hand before seeking to mold future generations in the same manor."

Albus had learned to deal with Minerva's fiery temper decades ago, but this was a cold fury that he had no counter to. He could only shake his head in denial as one of his greatest allies broke ranks and retired from the field. Some time after the door closed behind the ex-Deputy Headmistress, Albus looked again to the bottle of Ogden's Finest on his desk. He was going to need another one.

End Chapter

Chapter Six: Follow Me

July 2nd, 1995

Draco Malfoy stepped out of the floo and into his ancestral home.

The boy blushed but dutifully held still as his mother began to banish soot and lint off of his travel cloak. A moment later Narcissa judged him clean enough for a hug.

"Mother! Please....." Draco tried not to whine as he knew she would do this.

"I just couldn't wait a moment longer." Narcissa kissed her son on the cheek before taking another step back and busying herself with his collar. "I am your mother and I love you. Just because we have to show the common witch and wizard how to behave in public doesn't mean I must be cold and formal when it's just the two of us."

"Of course, Mother."

Draco watched his mother tilt her head off to one side as if waiting for something.

"I love you too, Mother." Draco gave his mother a light hug and kissed her cheek as well. Good answer.

Now that formalities were finally being peeled away, Draco knew it was only a matter of time before his mother demanded a thorough report on both his efforts to impress professors and his efforts to woo the young ladies of Hogwarts. He knew that his mother's opinion of Pansy fell two years ago and never recovered. Young Ladies were supposed to maintain their chastity until their wedding night... or at the very least until the engagement is official. Draco wasn't complaining, though. He knew his mother would be overjoyed to learn that Daphne Greengrass was now indebted to him.

POP

A house elf wearing a Malfoy Family napkin as though it were a toga immediately bowed before them.

"Lady and Young Master! You is being requested in the Lord's study! Lord Malfoy is being hosting a visitor!"

As Draco watched, motherly love disappeared from Narcissa's face. In its place was the elegant figure of Lady Malfoy, a proper pureblood icon of elite social circles. Draco fumed even as he mirrored her actions in becoming the proper heir to the Malfoy name and fortune. If the visitor weren't sufficiently well connected, Draco would swear vengeance on them for forcing his mother to hide herself from him in their own home.

The young scion formally offered his arm to Lady Malfoy. They walked silently out of the manor's entry hall, up a grand sweeping stair and down one of the manor's richly decorated hallways. As Narcissa and her son neared their destination, they saw one of the elves furiously cleaning a spot on the hall carpet and mumbling to itself.

"...-mumble- visitors not being knowing –mumble-... ...blood on the carpet, Malfoy carpets! The shame!"

The little magical servant nearly died of fright upon seeing Narcissa and Draco approach.

"Oh, noes! Dipsy is being too slow in cleaning the stain! Dipsy is slamming hands in oven as soon as stain is gone, she is!"

The distraught house elf cow-towed before Narcissa and Draco. Draco resisted the urge to kick Dipsy as he passed the cowering creature.

Soon the two were within reach of the heavily carved and gilded door to Lucius' study.

"Enter." Draco heard his father call.

The door opened itself upon Lord Malfoy's command allowing his wife and son passage. Inside the study, Narcissa formally presented her son to Lucius as befitting pureblood custom.

Draco maintained his formality while looking for visitors in his peripheral vision. It was only as Lucius asked him a question that

Draco noticed someone sitting in one of his father's dragon hide chairs by the fire.

"How goes your mission at Hogwarts, my son?" Draco saw his father's eyes briefly flicker to the hidden figure in the chair as the question was asked. What's going on? Why has there been no introductions?

"My continued efforts to stir things up have worked as expected, Father. The only Slytherin students of traditional dark families who don't jump when I call are sixth and seventh years. Those who are not already loyal will listen to reason when I point out how they can benefit."

"And what of those outside of Slytherin?" Lucius maintained his interrogation further confusing Draco as the mystery visitor could still hear everything.

"A few good purebloods in Ravenclaw are willing to do as I say but most remain independent." Draco knew better than to comment on Hufflepuff or Gryffindor to his father. Neither Malfoy male expected any followers in those houses.

Draco heard a harsh bark and a few seconds of deep laughter from their mystery guest. His father visibly flinched. Did this fool not know how to show respect to a Lord in their own house? Whoever he was, the wizard in question shifted in his seat and stood to address the Malfoys.

"And what of your connections in Hufflepuff, young Draco? What of the Gryffindors?" The... wizard's... uneven gait did nothing to lessen his shock at how completely unnatural the man looked. How could Father have allowed such a beast into their home?

"My Lord, there are no worthy students in either house... not even of the pureblood lines. They are good for nothing but becoming playthings and servants." Draco was alarmed at his father's declaration.

Was this their Dark Lord? His father deferred to this thing? Whatever Draco himself felt, his mother was obviously trying to hide a stronger reaction. She had not forgotten her poise and pureblood upbringing but Draco could hear his mother's breathing become less controlled.

"Lucius, I'm disappointed in you. Is this how you've been preparing your son to join the ruling class? By telling him to alienate and ignore half of all purebloods?" Draco couldn't help but stare at the stranger now.

The wizard who seemed to have more bruises and scar tissue than healthy skin was staring back into Draco's eyes. Draco felt those blood red eyes on his and froze in place. How could this be the Dark Lord his father said would return from the grave? Was this beast even a wizard at all? His father's plan was doubly cursed; once for being so Gryffindor-ish in nature and once again for being designed to support this thing before them.

For just a moment the Dark Lord seemed to grind his teeth in anger before erupting in more laughter.

"There is potential in you, young Malfoy... but you'll never realize it if you continue as you are now. Do you know why?" As Draco scrambled for an answer that wouldn't get him in trouble with his own father, the being that could only be Voldemort began to pace between Lucius and his family. "Unable to cross your father in his own house, eh boy? I understand your hesitation. He hasn't even introduced us."

Lucius moved to act but a harsh glare from his Master easily cowed the elder Malfoy.

"I am your father's Master. I am Lord Voldemort." There was an awkward silence as the Malfoys waited for Voldemort to speak again.

"I know you have just left school for the year, Draco, but I have a lesson for you. If you want to be truly powerful... if you want to have power beyond what the Malfoy name can get you, then listen. I didn't get where I am by openly insulting the half-bloods, half-breeds and mudbloods that inhabited Hogwarts when I was a student there. No. I was a role model, a prefect and then Head Boy. I didn't openly insult the filth that Dumbledore befouled Hogwarts' halls with, I simply proved that I was better. My grades were better, my magic was stronger and my friends more influential. I didn't tell the filth that I was better than them... they knew it to be true.

"By my seventh year, I was the undisputed master of Slytherin house and a trusted role model to Ravenclaw and Hufflepuff alike. I still had detractors in Gryffindor but at least a third of the house of lions considered me worth knowing. Do you have any friends in Gryffindor, Draco?"

Voldemort had delivered his lesson without turning from Draco's gaze and without stopping his pacing.

"No, My Lord." Draco surprised himself by answering without a stutter.

"You have much to learn about your place in this world, boy. You have years yet before I will accept you into my service, but before I set off, I have a task for you."

"Anything, My Lord."

"Inside of the Slytherin Common Room, you can be open in your opinions, but publicly you will change. Become what I'm sure Dumbledore desperately wanted Potter to be. Become someone one who can unite all four houses. Don't be so foolish as to claim a change of heart, but be more logical, more polite even to the undeserving filth. Don't tell the mudbloods that they are inferior, prove it as you tutor their half-blood friends and lead their girlfriends astray."

Voldemort stopped abruptly at the end of his rant and turned his eyes onto Narcissa. She had been silent and still so far. The Dark Lord smiled as he addressed the lady of the house. "A pleasure as always, Narcissa."

He two took two steps towards the door out before turning to address Lucius one last time. "You shall make ready a wing of the manor for my use. I have much to do these next few days but I will return."

"As you will it, My Lord." Lucius bowed low, an action which both wife and son copied.

The most gruesome Dark Lord to set foot on British soil in centuries made a noise half way between grunt and snort before turning on his heel and leaving the Malfoy family. All three held their silence for

several minutes after the heavy gilt door closed behind Lord Voldemort. Finally, a chime sounded. Voldemort apparated out of Malfoy Manor's grounds. They were alone again.

Narcissa spun around and pulled Draco into a deep embrace before releasing her tears.

"This... this is a good thing, Narcissa dear." Lucius spoke up. "Our Lord has returned as I knew he would. You will see the world change now. It will change for the better."

Lucius wanted to comfort his wife, but he knew she was never an eager supporter of the Dark Lord even at the height of Voldemort's power.

"That was not the man who gave you your mark! He will be the end of us all! I don't want my son to follow that thing!" Draco felt his mother shaking against him and wondered how the Dark Lord could possibly claim to be the Heir of Slytherin, a Lord above all other pureblood Lords.

"You must not say such things, Narcissa! His followers have been punished for merely thinking ill of him." Lucius opened the cabinet near his desk and pulled out a crystal decanter of amber liquid. Two crystal chalices quickly followed. "Draco, please finish settling in and amuse yourself until breakfast tomorrow. Your mother and I have much to discuss tonight."

Hesitantly, Draco pulled away from his mother. He could feel her despair. Was it only an hour ago that he genuinely wanted to see the Dark Lord reborn? Draco once thought the Dark Mark would be a mark of honor. He once expected a prince among purebloods to wash away the stain of lesser beings. He hadn't expected a false savior.

"Everything will be fine, Mother. I swear it." Draco kissed his mother's hand before leaving his parents alone to discuss things.

As the young Malfoy Scion retraced his steps down the hall, his eyes strayed to the carpet at his feet. It was clean now... no doubt Dipsy was busy breaking finger bones in the kitchen. Draco pondered his lot in life.

-o\O/o-

July 9th, 1995

Harry Potter was at peace.

This is not to say that he had passed on to the next great adventure, as he hadn't. His was the peace of having everything as it should be. The weather was beautiful. The clouds were fluffy. His girls were happy. If Harry had been alive, he might have even gone so far as to say that life was good. At this time yesterday, he and his girls had been much more anxious.

Well, Harry and Hermione were anxious along with anyone who wasn't eight years old. Gabrielle had been left out of the loop enough to be confused, but otherwise happily distracted. Upon seeing Gigi Bruyere and Aimee Devereux both pin Gabby to the floor and tickle her to within a hairsbreadth of peeing herself, Harry desperately wanted to learn how to possess someone so that he could do the tickling. He could tickle Gabby in her dreams, but it just wasn't the same.

The stress only really left yesterday evening when Daniel and Emma Granger were united once again with their fugitive daughter. They spent only a minute or two in teary reunions before being directed by members of the French Ministry of Magic to a well hidden magical terminal and a set of portkeys direct to the Delacour maison-forte. After polite greetings were exchanged, Alain and Daniel talked over wine as their women spent long hours crying, laughing, talking and crying again. Harry dealt with being nearly undetectable to the elder Grangers by putting Gabrielle to bed and guarding over her dreams.

Yes, in hindsight, yesterday turned out rather well and today was quickly proving even better. Portkeys made sightseeing so much easier as five hundred kilometers were spanned in seconds. The trip took Harry, the Delacours and the Grangers from breakfast on a picturesque hillside within view of the Alps to Sunday Mass in the Meuse Valley.

Domrémy-la-Pucelle is a mostly quiet little commune nestled up against the Meuse River in northeastern France. The village is as beautiful now as it was centuries ago when it is said that three Saints, one of them the Archangel Michael, appeared before an

illiterate farmer's daughter and told her to drive the English out of French lands.

Harry achieved his personal feeling of peace in front of the local church as the others attended Mass without him. At first, Harry was a bit disappointed to find that he couldn't actually follow the Delacours and Grangers in to Mass today. Something about established Houses of God led to a unique property that many magicals to this day couldn't quite explain. The church had its own wards; Muggle prayer based ones. Wards that for whatever reason wouldn't let Harry pass through any of the portals, windows or even the walls he tried to breach.

Hermione had a new research topic for the summer.

When Harry's favorite bookworm finally stopped trying to push him through solid objects and followed the others into Mass, Harry was left with nothing to do but shadow tourists and wait for the service to end. Well, to be honest, the waiting part was easy now. Being dead was good for something after all.

Harry knew of course that abandoning his muggle education in favor of Hogwarts did him no favors when it came to English-French relations and world history in general so he paid attention whenever he managed to spot tourists going over the village's history. He very quickly found the village's main attraction not even a stone's throw from the church. There, in a simple yet distinctive house with a sharply sloped roof, Jeanne d'Arc was born. That's Joan of Arc as she's known to the English and American tourists who didn't learn any French before coming to visit. Harry thought it was more than a little ironic that he would have qualified as a member of that group if he were still alive.

Oh, look at that. Another ghost.

At first Harry thought the ghost was a young man, but as he approached, he realized that he was in fact a she. Harry figured she was older than him but she really didn't look more than twenty or so. Once he looked past her unflattering clothes, he saw that she was quite a nice looking girl. True, she was nowhere close to the standard of a Delacour Veela, but she would have done alright for herself in Hogwarts.

Harry began to feel a little guilty about checking her out... she was on her knees praying. That must be double the sin of looking at a girl who's not praying, right? And in front of a church on Sunday of all days, too. Harry wanted to joke about going to Hell for such thoughts, but found that those jokes seemed much less funny and far more serious now that his heart had stopped working.

Harry looked around the grounds between the famous warrior maiden's birthplace and the church that said girl must have grown up worshiping in. Nope. No other ghosts. Just him and her. Despite rising curiosity, Harry kept his distance. If he were praying on a Sunday, he wouldn't want to be interrupted either. That tied in to why he was disappointed wards could keep him out of the centuries old church; Uncle Vernon and Aunt Petunia never took Harry to church with them... they said he wasn't good enough, that he'd burn to cinders the moment he crossed the threshold. How ironic.

"Pardon me." Harry continued to stare at the modest stone church, straining to feel Gabrielle's presence. At least she seems happy in there. "Pardon me, young man."

Harry turned around. Was someone actually addressing him?

"Have you come to pray too?" The girl. She was talking to Harry.

"Well, I would have liked to. My aunt and uncle never really let me go to church with them... and now that I'm like this, I can't seem to get past the door." Harry had gestured to his own transparent body while talking.

The girl nodded.

"They keep me out too. I pray every day hoping that God will let me back into His church... but He is punishing me. I can't enter and I can't..." The girl let a tear fall down her left cheek as she looked heavenward. No wonder she was praying outside. Why would a girl like her still be Earthbound?

"I can't imagine why God would punish a nice girl like you. Are you sure there isn't another reason why you... er... stayed here? My... end... was less than pleasant and I really didn't have what you'd call a full life."

"May I ask how?" Harry smiled. It wasn't really painful to talk about his death, just awkward.

"You'll never guess, what with all the guns and cars and drugs these days. Especially considering that I've been like this for less than a year now." Her eyebrows rose up, tears forgotten for a minute or two. "I got a spear to the chest as I was swimming my way out of a lake."

"Really? I can't tell you the last time I saw someone take a spear in the chest! Must have been a hundred years at least... no... it was much longer than that. And that was on dry land..." She looked up curiously. "How did that happen?"

How much should he say? The girl seemed quite devout... she may not take kindly to him being magical.

"Well, there was this girl. A sweet little girl that got pulled into Black Lake by these men that wanted to kill her. I don't know all the details, but it was a longstanding blood feud sort of thing. Anyway, I tried to pull her out of the lake, but before I could, one of the men ran his spear through both me and her." The dead girl seemed quite interested in Harry's story so far. "Luckily, someone I knew pulled the girl out and took her to get healed, but I... well, as you can see I didn't quite make it back to shore."

"Black Lake? I'm not sure I've heard of that one. So. This little girl is still alive then?"

"Yes. She's in that church right now. I wanted to go in with her, but... the doors..." Harry looked back to the church and focused on his Little Angel. Gabby was bored. Bored and fidgety.

"I....." The girl started, but seemed to have trouble getting her next line out. "I was tried for heresy and burned. I believed with all my heart and soul that I was a faithful servant of God. I don't understand why I'm still here. Were they right?"

Harry looked back to his ghost companion to see fear and uncertainty etched into her face. What could he say?

"I don't know. I wish I could help- and if I ever can, I will. Promise." Harry brought out his best smile. "I feel like praying... perhaps if I

pray for you and you pray for me, our prayers will be answered one day."

Harry went down to his knees and brought his hands together just as he saw the girl doing before. Suddenly, he realized just how impolite he'd been so far.

"Pardon me for not introducing myself. My name is Harry and I'm very please to meet you, Miss."

"Jeanne. My name is Jeanne. I'm pleased to meet you, Harry." Jeanne turned to kneel next to Harry. With matching smiles, they both began to pray.

Twenty minutes later, Harry's prayers were interrupted by an angel.

"Harry!" Gabrielle was running right for him. Hermione had been held up at the doors with her parents, but she was moving his way too. Harry waved to both of his girls.

"Gabrielle! What has your mother told you about speaking to imaginary friends in public?" Gabby ignored the brunette behind her until she was toe to toe with Harry, the 'imaginary friend' in question.

"Don't scold her too much, 'Mione. I have my own 'imaginary friend' now. Her name is Jeanne." Harry looked around for Jeanne, but she must have left when he was distracted. "Funny, I didn't expect her to just leave without saying goodbye."

"Maybe we scared her off. She was a ghost, wasn't she?" Hermione looked at Gabby even though her questions were for Harry. She would not be caught talking to empty air in the middle of this quaint little village. Gabby, for her part, was content to sip from a water bottle and look around. It really was a pretty day.

"Could be. And yes, she was dead. Oh! She couldn't get into the church either. It's not just me, then. Pity. She wanted in much more than I did."

"Should I be jealous, Harry? Going to sneak off and snog a local girl when I'm sleeping?" Hermione tried to look jealous, but the smile kind of gave her away.

"Never! Jeanne's a nice and very religious girl! She was praying when I met her. Why they burned her at the stake, I'll never know. Much too nice a girl to deserve that kind of thing. Now Pansy Parkinson, on the other hand..."

"Burned at the stake... witchcraft?" Hermione was trying to work something out. Harry could tell.

"No. Heresy." He really did want to meet her again. Maybe coming back on the occasional Sunday could be worked into his schedule.

"Just what did this Jeanne look like, Harry?" Fleur and the others had come up behind Hermione. With this kind of group, it would be easier to speak directly to him without getting the attention of strangers.

"She was shorter than me... not too much. Short dark hair. She was a nice looking girl except for unflattering clothes." Harry thought back to their little talk. What else could he say about her? "She's been dead for at least a hundred years but probably a lot longer than that. When I told her I got speared, she mentioned how long it's been since she's seen someone get a spear to the chest before."

The older Delacours began to quickly pass an idea back and forth in half whispers that Harry didn't completely catch. Hermione and her parents were similarly confused.

"What? Was it something I said?" Harry hadn't been so obviously left out of a Delacour family conversation since he got to France. It kind of hurt, really.

"Oh no, dear." Apolline turned her attention to the rest of the group. "It's just that we've heard of a ghost named Jeanne before. All French magicals know of her, but she's really quite shy and skittish. It would make sense to see her here."

"Really? So she's as popular as a Hogwarts ghost, then?" At Harry's question, Alain laughed.

"No, Harry. Jeanne is much, much more famous than that. If you met who we think you did, then you just met a patron saint of France." Alain's declaration caused Hermione to gasp. She must have figured it out.

"Did you really just meet Jeanne of Arc?" Hermione had trouble breathing. She had seen another ghost next to Harry when Gabby started running, but it... she... bolted as soon as Gabby yelled for Harry. Harry talked Jeanne of Arc! Hermione saw Jeanne of Arc with her own eyes! This was almost as big as when she learned that she was a witch! Why, it could be bigger!

While Hermione was too frantic to see the connection, this was exactly how some English magicals felt about seeing Harry Potter for the very first time. She had just out-fangirled Romilda Vane.

So Jeanne was the local girl that became world famous battling the English, huh? Harry saw part of a movie about her once. Vernon caught him that time. Bad memories. Very bad memories.

"Well, maybe I'll see her again some time. You never know, eh?" Jeanne looked like she could use a friend, and maybe some day he could help her get in that church.

-o\O/o-

July 14th, 1995

"... and I officially sent my non-magical transcripts, Hogwarts grades and class rankings as well as a personal letter stating my educational goals along with the Very First Ever (Unofficial) Hogwarts transfer request... signed by my parents... in triplicate."

Alain Delacour was having a rare Friday evening with his family and guests at the family penthouse in the heart of Paris. He rarely got to enjoy an evening listening to everyone gossip about their week as magical French-English diplomacy had taken a rather harsh turn in the past few weeks. Unfortunately for him, it was difficult to ignore the increasingly angry English rhetoric aimed at his own Little Angel. Even the revelation of Potter's Mark within the pages of the Daily Prophet was twisted to be another Dark Mark. Never before had Alain considered the near isolationist policies of his magical neighbors across the channel to be a silver lining and not a cloud in his political dealings. God forbid a similar incident happen with any of the continental magical powers.

"I can already tell you, Hermione, that many of my associates just down the hall in the Department of Education are as pleased as our dear Headmistress Maxime to see your paperwork submitted. With the baseless trash that passes as news and radio fare back in London, few if any of our own Ministry's employees are inclined to listen to Minister Fudge's demands to 'return Ministry property' and to send you back to their loving embrace. Don't be surprised to find yourself the lead story in The Mystic in a day or two."

Hermione blushed at the thought of two magical nations fighting over her. Harry never got that kind of attention and he was the Boy-Who-Lived. Sitting next to Hermione, Daniel and Emma were trying not to react too much. They were both of the opinion that their daughter was the most intelligent, most beautiful girl on Earth, magical or not... but that didn't mean they were comfortable with her being an international chew toy.

"And... and you're sure they won't try something underhanded? Like a portkey or some such magical trap?" Daniel had to ask again. True, he'd heard the answer before, but there's nothing like learning how easy it is for Minister Fudge and his lackeys to lie, threaten and bribe their way through life to make him fear for his daughter's safety.

Daniel was seated to Alain's left with Emma and Hermione. There was one unused setting between Hermione and Apolline's seat at the other end of the table. To Apolline's left, another unused setting was open before Gabby and Fleur filled the last two seats on their father's right. Segolene was home with her mother for the time being. Harry... well, he tended to shift from one unused setting to the next depending on which of his witches he wanted to sit next to.

"Fudge has no influence outside of England and Dumbledore is less influential than he would like to think." Alain took another sip of his wine. "What few illicit contacts the English keep in France are constantly monitored and international traffic is tightly controlled. You have little to fear so long as you remain our guests. You have my word."

"Maman, I have received a letter from Cedric. Despite prevailing sentiment in his home country, he intends to travel through France in early August and requests permission to visit." Fleur took her father's words as an opportunity to change subjects.

"And does Cedric intend to court you on this visit?" Apolline couldn't resist. Her little babies were growing up!

"Does his father know about Cedric's plans? Mister Diggory is a Ministry official... part of the Department of Regulation and Control of Magical Creatures if I remember correctly." Alain couldn't help but ask.

Alain knew that Fleur was in full bloom physically and fresh from her N.E.W.T.s academically; she would be the target of much male adoration. Too much, really. As a father, it made him cringe and yet it was with no small amount of pride that he could admit to siring one of the most desirable teenaged witches in France, if not Western Europe. He also knew that there were those both in and out of Europe that considered his wife and daughters to be sub-human. The elder Diggory's job at the British Ministry of Magic was to regulate and control his women and others like them who possess more magical blood than common witches would have.

"Cedric mentioned that his father expects him to report back on the condition of Hermione's 'imprisonment'. While Segolene was planning on modifying Hermione's Hogwarts uniform to become negligee when she came back, -(Hermione blushed deep at that revelation)- perhaps we should just cut it up some and add dirt and food stains. If we are to sacrifice her soul to a demon queen as the Prophet is currently proclaiming, then Mother's pure, angelic slave should look the part of a sacrificial victim, no?"

"My vote's for the negligee." Harry wanted to see that. Harry also wanted to see Hermione reproduce that look in the dreamworld later. Maybe Harry could catch Hermione sleeping at some time or other when Gabby's up and energetic. Brilliant.

Apolline and Fleur both began to laugh at how quickly Harry had cast his vote. Alain maintained his composure. Gabby giggled in that 'I don't know what's funny' way young children have when they completely miss the grown-up joke that must be funny for everyone else to laugh.

Hermione's face burned hot enough to fry eggs on and her parents were feeling a little left out. As non-magical people, they still couldn't see or hear Harry unless he was in a wizarding photo. Zoé had taken it upon herself to correct this problem by following the

Grangers and taking wizarding photos any time Hermione or her parents were in a good pose with Harry. Emma and Daniel were both impressed and disturbed that proof of an unseen, unheard boy was so easy to come by.

As Hermione quietly explained the joke to her parents, Alain chose to address the real issue. "So long as the young man is willing to swear an oath that he report back honestly... and treat you with respect... then I see no problem with hosting him for a week. Will that be sufficient, Princess?"

"Thank you, Papa. I will send a reply." Fleur blushed, not from her father's approval of Cedric but of his use of her childhood nickname. She silently resolved to continue calling Gabrielle 'Little Angel' for at least three more decades.

"How is your former professor doing, Hermione? You've been keeping up with Professor McGonagall, haven't you?" Hermione started at Apolline's question, explanations about her dead boyfriend's opinion on the dirty school girl look versus the submissive victim look were thankfully derailed en masse.

"Oh, she's doing very well! I just got a new letter in the other day. At first, she was a little disheartened to find that neither Beauxbatons nor Salem had openings for a Transfiguration Master, even one of her caliber. Apparently she's found a promising tutoring job here in France, one that may last long enough for her to wait out the Beauxbatons Professor who's rumored to be retiring soon." This was a subject Hermione could really sink her teeth into. In a year or two, she may actually get to study under her former Head of House again!

While Hermione's focus began to drift, Apolline winked at her youngest. Gabby smiled brilliantly and winked back to her mother in a highly over exaggerated way. Hermione was the only one at the table that missed her gesture.

"Speaking of tutors," Apolline took control of the discussion again, "Alain and I have agreed to hire a tutor for Gabrielle to start some of the wand arts a little early."

This got everyone's attention. Apolline may look less than half her husband's age (much less than half if you asked any of the

Grangers) but she was the undisputed queen of the dinner table's social schedule.

"We are concerned that Little Angel's uncommon ability with Harry's wand could lead to trouble later on if she doesn't learn good wand discipline soon. Hermione?"

The English witch looked to Apolline. "Yes, Auntie Apolline?"

"While our intent is to help Gabrielle first and foremost, the witch I am interviewing Monday morning has time and energy enough for several students."

Gabrielle was vibrating, near exploding with excitement. Fleur smiled but was otherwise well composed. Hermione still didn't know the Delacour girls close enough to better read their reactions and merely thought they were excited about the tutor. In a way, they were.

Hermione thanked God for France's less restrictive under-aged magic use laws. Unsupervised magic was still illegal before O.W.L.s, but proper lessons were allowed. She couldn't think of a single Weasley that would be visibly excited by the thought of a summer tutor though. To be fair, Ginny may have been willing to have summer lessons at the Burrow and at least one of the older boys took interest in a Mastery... but to actually seem excited at a tutor's arrival? The twins might pretend to be excited just to mess with Ron.

"Thank you, Auntie." Hermione and Harry smiled at each other. Even with a few clouds on the horizon, the future was still looking bright.

-o\O/o-

July 15th, 1995

"Alain?" Hermione's parents had been looking for a chance to speak with their host without the children around for quite some time. Tonight all four of the younger residents, ghost included, were having movie night. Willow was nearly over and cassettes for both Ghost and Forrest Gump were sitting by the VHS player. Gabrielle was getting drowsy already.

"Emma. Daniel. What can I do for you?" Alain was reclining on a balcony overlooking the Eiffel tower, a brandy in one hand and a cigarette in the other.

POP

Virginie, Zoé's cousin, popped onto the balcony and offered the elder Grangers a selection of drinks and tobaccos to choose from. Emma chose to go without while her husband partook of the proffered Scotch.

"What haven't you done for us would be a better summation of the past week." Daniel started.

"I want you to know that we are very thankful for the help you've provided us-" He motioned between himself and Emma, who nodded in support. "-especially in the protection given to our daughter. I used to think that as a former military officer I would be able to protect Hermione from anything life could throw at her. That feeling of security ended on her eleventh birthday."

Daniel took a stiff shot of his scotch before continuing on. Alain and Emma both stayed quiet as not to break his train of thought.

"More than once we've come close to pulling Hermione out of Hogwarts. Two years ago we even went so far as to request copies of withdrawal forms from the Ministry, only to have a rather rude letter returned by owl stating that we could withdraw our daughter, but only if we were willing to have her magic bound and all knowledge of the magical world erased from the three of us.

"We couldn't take magic away from Hermione... she wanted it more than anything and to hell with the trolls and magical illnesses. Check that, giant snakes. Wasn't a 'magical illness' at all... but I digress. The point is that it's about time we started paying you and your family back for your help."

Alain smiled.

"Your daughter is a wonderful young lady and it is my honor and pleasure to support her, and her equally exceptional parents, in their time of need. You are guests of the Delacours and as my guests you

will not pay one franc or pound or galleon for anything I have to offer."

"At least let us pay for her summer lessons." Emma blurted out the very thing she and her husband had agreed on as soon as they heard the word tutor.

Alain laughed.

Daniel and Emma both looked at each other confused. Their host would never intentionally insult them, so this must be something else. With their unvoiced conversation over in a fraction of a second, they both turned back to Alain and waited for his explanation.

"... ha-ha... hmmmmm. Please excuse me. Ohhhhh, I hope you do not take offense, but your daughter has already brought up the issue of repayment for any lessons she may take." Alain brought up his cigarette and took a deep breath. "I'm guessing that Hermione has not shown the two of you her Gringotts ledger, has she?"

Both Grangers shook their heads. They were curious but also knew that Hermione had her reasons for putting it off.

"Just this morning, she and Harry cornered me in my study. The two of them knew that Hermione had money in Gringotts, but neither of them had much experience with magical estates or goblin bookkeeping. Believe me, these are not areas to be left to amateurs."

"So they wanted to pay but didn't know for sure if they could?" Emma was surprised. There must be something special about Goblin bookkeeping if Hermoine couldn't crack the code.

"You could say that." Alain forced down his amusement. Finance should be dealt with seriously. "Shortly after our announcement about the tutoring, Hermione finally had a real reason to open her ledger rather than hide it. I'm told Harry was suddenly quite curious to know how much he was worth. For whatever reason, nobody ever told him what to expect. At the very least, Dumbledore should have... but it's too late for that isn't it? Anyway, Hermione very quickly discovered two problems.

"First, she didn't know what the current conversion rates were. I told her that the exchange rate varies drastically from bank to bank and from country to country and that The Mystic would have a current quote in the last edition. Her follow up question was about accessing her vault, as it was in London. While this would be a problem if she wanted to... say... invest in a business or buy real estate, anything less is easily handled by bank transfers."

"So our daughter can pay for the lessons, then?" Daniel was ready to pick up another drink. He hated talking finance.

"Quite easily. Perhaps a bit of background is in order. You see, I knew a little about the Potters due to my work, but watching a strange boy die for my little girl made me want to learn all I could of this Boy-Who-Lived. While the Potter name doesn't carry the weight it once did, Harry was the last blood descendant of a very old magical line. Unfortunately, the men of the line were historically known for volunteering when they heard the Call to Arms and the Potter name eroded slowly one war at a time. I heard your daughter mention on more than one occasion that Harry had... still has... a 'saving people thing'. It seems to be the defining trait in all Potters. While quite noble, this means that the Potters did not amass vast fortunes."

"So she'll go through Harry's money quickly if we don't place some restrictions? I'm sure she would still consider summer tutoring a worthy investment." Emma was right for the most part.

"I agree that tutoring is a wise investment, but Hermione would likely need Fleur's help to burn through that much money quickly. I only had a few minutes to read over her ledger, but I expect that Hermione could buy your home in England and the penthouse we are currently residing in at the same time and still have a small cushion to live on for a few years. She also owns a few dozen acres in Wales. Her land in Godric's Hollow is the traditional Potter homestead."

Emma and Daniel remained quiet. This was a lot to take in at one time. Considering the location and view of this City of Light penthouse, it was possible that Hermione was worth more than they were.

-o\O/o-

July 17th, 1995

Gabby's room in their family penthouse in Paris was nothing like Hermione thought it would be. She expected to see wall to wall stuffed animals and tea sets but instead found a studio of the arts. Violins and a viola occupied one corner next to a music stand. Ballet slippers, leotards and tutus were hanging in the eight year old's closet. Two easels were set up near a window with eastern exposure. Paint stains seemed to dot the room in defiance of the Delacour family elves. The girl in question could be heard singing on the other side of a richly stained door. She was supposed to be brushing her teeth.

"Zoé." Fleur called from beside her English friend.

POP

"Mistress calls for Zoé? I am here to serve." Zoé curtsied before the witches.

"Please lay out one of Gabrielle's school uniforms. She will be taking wand lessons today."

"Zoe will do as Mistress asks of her."

"Perhaps you should make her uniform fireproof." Fleur added almost as an afterthought. Hermione had heard of some incident involving fire at Fleur's first charms lesson, but the Veela simply refused to answer any follow up questions.

"I will also let out the hem. Young Mistress Gabrielle is getting taller this summer."

"Thank you Zoé."

POP

Hermione was pleased to see her friend act polite to Zoé. While the Delacour family house elves were still clearly servants, they were given respect and gratitude for all their work. Perhaps if Hermione were subtle about the question...

"Why does your family own slaves?" Perhaps Hermione should research the meaning of the word subtle or get off of her pulpit before trying to be subtle...

Many would have reacted poorly to Hermione's questions. Fleur had been expecting this question ever since she discovered Hermione would be fleeing England.

"We have elves bound to our family, this is true. We do not have slaves."

"Do you pay Zoé and Virginie wages?"

"Of course not."

"But they serve your house?"

"Yes."

"They're slaves!" Hermione was quite comfortable on her pulpit. Subtlety could be ignored for now.

"Hermione, there is more to house elves than you know. But don't take my word for it. Zoé?"

POP

"Mistress calls for Zoé?" The petit elf popped in and asked her question without stopping her chore. Little hands were jerking back and forth in a blur as the hem to Gabby's light blue school uniform skirt was let out a centimeter or three.

"She calls you Mistress and obeys your commands without pay. How is that not slavery?"

"Zoé. Please explain our relationship to Miss Granger."

The elf in question didn't even pause in her needlework to answer. Young Mistress Gabrielle was going to need her skirt soon.

"Elves like Zoé be needing witches and wizards to live, Mistress Granger. We cannot live without their magic."

"That's just what they want you to think. Dobby was freed from the Malfoy's and is living just fine."

"No, Mistress Granger. You not knowing how elf magic works. Witches like Mistress Fleur be having a magical core. Elves like Zoé be not having one. I be needing magic of others."

"Wh- what?" Hermione never heard this before. Why hadn't she ever heard this before?

"Long ago... too long to be remembering when... elves be losing their magic and be close to dieing off. Elves that be living with wizard kind be staying living while whole villages of elves in forests be lost forever. Elves be finding that healthiest of them all are ones who serve wizard families as maids and butlers. Why? Elves thinking it be magic is given in orders and work. Big wizard family meaning much magic to give to elves. Wizard schools be having lots of elves because hallways and dormitories and classrooms be glowing with magic for elves to be using." Just another four hundred and thirty-six stitches left and Gabby's skirt would be ready.

Hermione was shocked. No one had ever bothered to explain house elves to her before and the Hogwarts Library was only good for identifying magical creatures, not explaining their origins. Was this the kind of knowledge that pureblood magicals were taught in early childhood?

"S- so... your an energy vampire?"

"Zoé not being a vampire, Mistress Granger. Zoé not being making wizards into elves with bites." Two hundred and eighty-seven stitches remaining.

"I'm sorry, Zoé. That's not what I meant. I meant that you need to get your magic from another living thing. Couldn't English elves just live in the Forbidden Forest with all of the other magical creatures?"

"No, Mistress Granger. Elves cannot be taking magic from other creatures because creatures be not giving it away. Wizards be using magic in spells and wands and enchantments and be always making more magic in their cores. Wizard kind is being only hope for elves to live."

"Dobby is alive after being given clothes. Harry freed Dobby. Why isn't he dead?" Hermione didn't want to believe what she heard.

Was evolution responsible for creating a slave race? Was a sickness that only affected elven kind responsible? Hermione had heard of several magical illnesses that could turn wizards into squibs if left untreated. Perhaps this was similar?

"Where is Dobby being now?" Twelve stitches left... and... done!

"Dobby is-"

POP

"Dobby is here! Does Harry Potter's Missy Granger need Dobby?"

"Good morning, Dobby. I was just discussing house elves and why they serve wizarding families with Fleur and Zoé, here. Can you tell me how it is that you are still alive if you were freed from the Malfoys?" Hermione knew that this would be her only chance to rally. If she could just get Dobby to deny one small part of Zoé's explanation, then she could claim it's all just propaganda.

"Oh, yes! Dobby is free of the Evil Malfoys! Dobby hates Malfoys but Dobby loves the Great Harry Potter Sir and the Great Harry Potter's Missy Granger and the Great Harry Potter's school Hoggy Warts and Dobby be doing much work keeping the Great Harry Potter's school clean and the students happy! Dobby is a good elf!"

"Zoé be thinking Dobby be too loud! Dobby being quiet for Mistress Fleur and Mistress Hermione." Dobby immediately nodded and brought himself under control. "Zoé is being finished with Young Mistress Gabrielle's skirt. May Zoé be excused?"

"Yes. Thank you, Zoé." Fleur addressed the little elf who seemed to be doing quite well in her lecture to Hermione before Dobby interrupted.

POP

"And thank you, Dobby. You are a good friend." Hermione thought about Dobby's long trip from Hogwarts or wherever he had been before getting summoned. "I don't really have anything for you to do,

so if you wanted to return to... whatever it was that you were doing, then you can."

"And... what if... what if Dobby wanted to stay?"

He really did look pitiful. When did he learn how to do the 'sad puppy' look? Hermione wanted to say he could stay, but really it wasn't her decision to make. Luckily, there was someone in the room who could make that decision.

"Dobby?" Fleur spoke up.

"Yes, Missy Flower? What can Dobby do for you?" The little elf was smiling. It was obvious that he'd rather stay with them near 'The Great Harry Potter Sir', at least for a little while.

"Could you find Harry for us? Our guest is supposed to arrive soon."

"Dobby will find the Great Harry Potter Sir for Missy Flower."

POP

As potential students finished getting ready, Apolline watched the flames in her foyer fireplace turn green. The flames peaked for a moment as the figure of a witch entered Paris from the UK.

-knock, knock-

"Gabby? Are you decent?" On the other side of her bathroom door, Hermione heard giggling. "We're coming in."

Fleur opened the door to her sister's private bathrooms and stopped dead at the spectacle before her. Hermione was about to step around her until she too saw what was happening and froze.

Gabrielle was mostly dressed, but she was still without shoes and her hat. That wasn't the problem. Gabrielle was giggling madly and twirling about in her stockings. That wasn't what Fleur wanted to see, but it still wasn't the problem.

"Gabrielle..." "Dobby..." Fleur and Hermione shouted together. "STOP!"

Gabrielle froze in place and her eyes widened into an 'I'm in trouble' look. Dobby froze, and in doing so froze the two magical rivers of water spewing out of Gabby's personal sinks. The immobile water etched two spiral paths around Gabby and seemed to dip and bob from only a few centimeters above the tile floor to a few centimeters from the ceiling. By some miracle, the floor was still dry. On closer inspection, Hermione noticed that both airborne rivers seemed to be anchored to a floor drain in the center of the room.

The silent tableau was only broken when a ghost pulled himself out from inside one of the faucets to see why all the fun stopped.

"Dobby? Is there someth- uh, oh... Good morning, 'Mione. Morning, Fleur." Harry used his best innocent schoolboy look.

"Harry Potter! What have you been doing?" Oh, dear. Hermione was not happy. "Gabrielle needs to be ready to meet the tutor any minute now and she's not ready. Honestly, what were you thinking?"

Dobby, Harry and Gabby all looked at each other for a few seconds before Harry started snickering. Gabby relaxed from her pirouette and began to giggle again. Dobby smirked and banished all of the water into a large bathtub along the far wall.

"Play time is over, Little Angel. Get your shoes on." Fleur had her arms crossed and was tapping her foot, but a smile was threatening to force its way onto her face. The mess wasn't nearly as bad as it could have been.

Harry looked over to see that Hermione was the only one that was still upset.

"I'm sorry 'Mione, but Gabby wanted to see a trick and I just figured out how Myrtle messes with the pipes back at Hogwarts. Dobby was here to keep her from getting messy the whole time."

As Harry tried to calm Hermione down, Gabby slipped both shoes on and began to pull her hair into a tail. Fleur silently came behind her and performed a quick braid charm and added a silk ribbon bow at the end.

"All she needs is her hat, see?"

And seconds later, Gabby was fully dressed.

POP

"Lady Apolline be wanting you all in the sitting room. We be having a guest."

"Thank you, Virginie." Fleur dismissed the elf. Noting that Hermione was still giving Harry the evil eye, she chose to come to his rescue by them all to her mother. "Come on. We're done here."

As the others filed out of Gabrielle's bathroom, Virginie began to clean up the sinks and Gabby's discarded clothes from earlier. Fleur led them through a few rooms and halls until they could hear Apolline speaking to the as yet unseen tutor.

"... well I'm sure that I won't be able to find a more qualified person to help Little Angel no matter how far I look."

Fleur stopped at the last door opening and held her hand out to keep the others from entering the sitting room. Her mother saw Fleur decided that introductions were in order. Or perhaps reintroductions would be a better term. Apolline nodded to her eldest, giving Fleur the okay to enter.

"Good morning Professor. It's so good to see you again." Fleur curtseyed before their guest prompting Gabrielle to do the same.

"Good morning Professor." Hermione turned the corner just ahead of Harry as Gabrielle was in the middle of her curtsey.

"Good morn- Oh! P-Professor McGonagall! What are you doing in Paris?" Hermione stopped short of her planned curtsey causing Harry to accidentally pass through the girl. He was too busy gaping at his former Head of House to stop.

"Oh, lass. You don't know how happy I am to see the lot of you. And to see you so happy and healthy as well! Let me have a look at you." Minerva stepped up to the fifteen year old ex-Gryffindor and braced herself as her favorite student in years slammed into her and began to cry her eyes out. The ladies Delacour all quietly moved to the side as if they all knew this would happen... which they did.

Following Gabby, Harry turned to Apolline and whispered, "You are hiring her, right?"

Apolline nodded quickly.

Everything was going to be okay.

-o\O/o-

Calais.

A man and his dog stepped off of the ferry from Dover, conveniently side stepping the non-magical officials by means of notice-me-not charms.

These charms did nothing to keep four aurors in navy blue cloaks from surrounding the pair in a loose ring, wands out.

"I'm afraid, Sir, that you forgot a few important steps that are necessary for international travel." The lead auror held this Englishman's attention while his fellow aurors got ready to cast.

Remus Lupin held his empty hands out to either side in as nonthreatening a posture as a werewolf could manage.

"I'm sorry about that, but we really don't want to go back if we can help it. Would it be possible to tell Alain Delacour that Harry Potter's godfather wants to talk to him?"

"Are you telling me that you are Harry Potter's godfather?" The lead auror looked at one of his men behind the stranger. Wands were raised.

"No, he is." Remus looked at the dog.

Not liking this plan, but unable to come up with a better one, Sirius Black reverted to human form. At least the French were likely to imprison him here rather than send him back to England with all the bad blood between their magical ministries.

Four silent stupefies were cast by the ring of French aurors.

After a brief surge of red light, darkness took both Moony and Padfoot.

End Chapter

Chapter Seven: Playing With Fire

"So," Minerva McGonagall called out to the room in general, "are we ready to begin?"

Gabrielle nodded like a house elf. This was so exciting! She was going to get to use her Harry wand and do magic on purpose and everything!

The little silver-blond tressed Veela was being very proper and good and quiet even after Hermione stopped crying on her favorite instructor. Yes, she wanted with every fiber of her being to pull Hermione off of the old lady and get started, but Momma taught her better than that a long time ago. After holding onto each other for forever, Hermione and the old lady backed off and talked some before finally getting back to what really mattered this morning... Gabby! That's when the Transfiguration Mistress addressed her question to the room at large.

Minerva smiled briefly at Gabby's enthusiasm before letting her professional control reassert itself.

Ooooh! Now she looked all stern just like Fleur's professors... the ones Gabby's met in the past. She began to wonder why no one ever seemed happy to teach magic. Gabby promised herself that if she ever taught magic then she would smile in every class. How could it not be the funnest thing ever?

Gabby looked around to make sure Momma and Fleur and Hermione and Harry were all watching like she wanted them too.

"Very well. I believe that this young lady standing before me couldn't possibly wait any longer to start. Could you dear?" Gabby violently shook her head at Minerva who allowed another brief smile to show before her control re-asserted itself.

"Magic is a wonderful thing, Miss Delacour. It makes us who we are and shapes the world around us. But we must have respect for magic. We must maintain control over it. If we do not have respect and control over our magic, it can hurt us."

Gabby nodded her head dutifully. Grownups always said things like that even though she and Aimee and Gigi never figured out what they meant. Whatever.

Her new tutor turned to Momma and asked a question, "Is this the room lessons are to be taught in?"

"Yes, Misses McGonagall." Apolline looked around the room at the furniture and decorations, "Everything here has been either protected or deemed expendable. Do not worry if a mess is made."

"Thank you, Madame Delacour." Minerva continued, "May I have Gabrielle's wand?"

"Of course." Apolline moved to a small jewelry box at one end of the room and removed Gabby's Harry wand. The new student's nervous excitement spiked yet again. "The chain is spelled to hold the wand close to Gabby's breast when out of hand and to stretch a full arms-length when she picks it up. This wand has become Gabrielle's most treasured possession and her favorite necklace."

Apolline then placed the very familiar wand in Misses McGonagall's hands. Were they trembling? "It still feels like Harry. How wonderful."

Minerva may have made a sniffing sound of some sort but no one chose to point it out to her. Harry looked away for a moment, seemingly trying to get something out of his eye.

"This is a special wand, young lady, and if you take good care of it, it will do great things for you. I'm sure of that."

"Oui, Mada- I mean... Yes, Mam."

As Mrs. McGonagall placed the Harry wand over Gabby's head, the little girl rose up as far as her spotless white trainers would allow. Pity she wasn't wearing ballet slippers or Gabby would've gone up on point for it.

"I am told that Veela tend to start learning fire spells before others as a way to aid in controlling their natural talents with the element..." The ex-Deputy Headmistress looked once more to Apolline, who

nodded. Fleur was nodding her head very vigorously off to the side. "...therefore I shall begin with lighting candles rather than Lumos."

Minerva wordlessly transfigured some loose paper on a coffee table into a line of unlit candles in candlesticks. Minerva then made sure that she was off to one side of the coffee table as to best judge Gabrielle's technique.

"Miss Delacour, first I shall ask you to repeat the incantation: *ignis candesco*."

"*Ignis candesco*." Gabrielle may have been excited enough to set the candles ablaze with accidental magic alone, but she desperately wanted to do this very grown up thing.

"Very good pronunciation, dear. Please say it one more time."

"*Ignis candesco!*" Gabby's family could almost hear the pride in her voice.

"Your pronunciation is flawless. Now for the next part. Please raise your wand and point loosely at the table." Gabby's hand practically teleported into position, somehow gaining a wand in the process. Big Sister Fleur snorted trying to bite back her laughter.

Gabby momentarily broke from her Perfect Angel act to give her sister a wet raspberry before turning back again.

"If you ladies are quite finished, I should like to see you gently flick your wand upwards as though you are showing the fire that it should come up from the wick. I shall demonstrate." Minerva demonstrated her flick three times, during which the end of her wand never traveled more than a few centimeters in any direction.

Gabby tried to pay close attention. Music lessons came to mind... always pressing the key or twisting the bow or plucking the string just so had become a minor religion to the girl. Why, Little Angel was the darling of Joliebatons Academie's performing arts program long before she became famous as the Girl-Who-Lived.

Gabby took a deep cleansing breath, made her 'I'm concentrating' face and practiced the movement three times.

"Very good, Miss Delacour. Were we in a Hogwarts classroom, you would have just earned ten points for your house." Gabby's smile went incandescent and her cheeks were flushed. Ohhhhh, she just loved compliments from professors!

"Now we shall try and join the two pieces, but a spell is not just some words and a flick... Mister Potter?" Harry seemed surprised to be called out, but he was in a room without snake or Snape, surely this would turn out well. "Can you tell me what we are missing? What causes the flame to burn or the patronus to charge?"

"Errr..." Harry stalled long enough for Hermione to show her 'Oh, honestly, Harry' face. "Intent? Intent! You have to want the flames to rise and all."

"Correct Mister Potter. You see Miss Delacour? Intent. You have to want the candle to come alight, just as Mister Potter said."

Gabby's head bounced up and down rapidly, just as before. She wanted it alright. She wanted it more than anything.

"May I try the spell now, Misses McGonagall?" Gabrielle was tracing a line on the floor with the toe of her right shoe as she adopted her best innocent angel face and added a bit of puppydog eyes.

Minerva had seen some real charmers pass through the halls of Hogwarts in her time so she knew exactly what Gabby was doing. Her heart was still pierced all the same. Thank Circe the Weasley twins never figured out how to do that face.

"Please do, dear."

Gabby snapped into a stance that she's seen her sister practice on countless occasions over the years. Taking a deep breath, she slowly closed her eyes and mentally reviewed the incantation along with the wand flick. When she opened her eyes, she wanted it. She really, really wanted it.

"Ignis cadeso."

Her pronunciation was flawless. Her flick was well timed and went just so. She wanted it badly... and she was Veela...

-FWOOOSH-

The entire coffee table was engulfed in blue-white flames.

"Eeeeeek!" Too much! Too much! Too much!

"STOP!" Gabby jabbed her wand at the flaming table before either of the adults present could so much as move to correct things. Panic fueled instinct shaped both her actions and intent.

The fire stopped.

The flames didn't go away. Light and heat didn't fade. They didn't move. They stopped.

Gabrielle dropped her wand and spun around to hide her face behind shaking hands. As Apolline and Minerva tried and failed to banish or suppress the trapped fire behind her, Gabby began to feel hot tears drop from cheek to palm.

What did she do wrong? It was SO unfair! And Momma saw and Fleur saw and Hermione saw and Harry... oh! Harry saw her mess up! Surely Misses McGonagall would go away and the lessons would stop and Gabby would be soooooo sad. Fleur leapt to her sister's side and began to whisper into her ear as a low moan escaped Gabby's throat.

"It's alright Little Angel... Big Sissy Flower's going to make it all better... Momma and Auntie McGonagall will make the fire go away and then you'll get to try again..." Gabby wanted to say her big sister was wrong and that Fleur was talking to her like she was a little baby but those fingers running up and down her back felt really good.

Big Sissy Flower smiled into her Little Angel's hair. Fireproofing the uniform was a good idea.

"Well, I thought you were brilliant, Gabby." Harry liked her magic? She didn't do bad? Maybe she could stop sniffing, then.

"R-really? I- I didn't do bad?"

"Really. Why, the first time I ever tried to do magic, couldn't get my feather to so much as twitch... never mind the floating about

Professor Flitwick was aiming for. And that's with the same wand you've got dangling about your neck. Since you did too much, that must mean you're loads more powerful than I was. Right?"

Gabby looked up from her sister's tight embrace to see the warm smile of her favoritest ghost ever... even better than Jeanne.

"I'm... I'm stronger than you? But... but Hermione said you're really strong. You chased away a big cloud of monsters the year before."

"I don't know. Some people say I had lots of magic and I suppose it's true... but I never made fire stop like what you just did! Why, you told it to stop and it stopped like a good doggy! Next, you'll be teaching the fire tricks." Fleur's fingers worked one kind of magic on sad little Gabby while Harry's praise worked another. Slowly, Little Angel began to calm down.

After another five minutes of soft compliments and gentle back rubs, Gabby was ready to try lighting just one candle again. Ten minutes later, Minerva and Apolline successfully disenchanted Gabby's frozen fire and reset the table. Hermione learned more about magic in those fifteen minutes than she had in any single class at Hogwarts. This was going to be brilliant!

-o\O/o-

Alain Algernon Delacour sat at his richly stained, well polished and perfectly organized desk deep within the French Ministry of Magic's Department of the Interior. In fact, he was seated in the Department Head's office as he was that Department Head.

The husband and father of Veela relaxed for a moment as one of his subordinates delivered another report on steadily shrinking merman populations dotting the Mediterranean coast. At least now the population reductions were voluntary. Perhaps in a year or two his aurors would stop finding injured or dead mermen lying on French shores... not to mention the occasional hexed Englishman in need of medical attention and a hangover cure. Thank Jeanne the unpleasantness has yet to infect non-magical relations between their two countries.

It was near the young inspector's final summary that Alain picked up a report from the other day in Calais. His work day would finally become interesting.

"Inspector Clouseau."

"Yes, sir?"

"What do you know of the incident in Calais yesterday?" Alain lowered the report and turned it around for Clouseau to see. The young man who graduated from a post-N.E.W.T. Civil Service program only two years ago picked up the report but barely glanced at it. He had nearly memorized it before entering Alain's office.

"Foreign Affairs has the two Englishmen in questioning right now, Sir. They were understandably surprised to catch such a well known criminal as Black so easily. Rumor has it that the questioning is going completely against what we thought we were going to get. Monsieur Depaul has made no moves towards alerting the English that we even have Black."

Alain placed a finger on the Department Seal inscribed into the surface of his desk as part of the Ministry's internal communications system. "Guillimette."

A soft yet professional witch's voice returned his call. "Yes, Monsieur Delacour?"

"Please inform Monsieur Depaul in Foreign Affairs that I wish to speak with him at his earliest convenience. You can reschedule any of my appointments for today or tomorrow as necessary."

"Yes, Monsieur Delacour." Alain removed his finger from the magical intercom and leaned back into his chair. As Inspector Clouseau continued his report on the morning's hot topics, Alain contemplated the stories Hermione and Harry have both been telling for weeks. If they were true (Hermione and Harry have been nothing but honest so far), and if his aurors really had Sirius Black and Remus Lupin, then his home life and France's relationship with Minister Fudge were both going to be shaken up yet again. Some days it just doesn't pay to remain sober.

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"Pardon me, sir?" Hermione pulled her eyes away from the transfiguration tome Minerva had left behind for her new student and looked up at her host.

"Where are my manners? Please excuse the interruption. Fleur can get lost in a book just as easily as you, so I am used to repeating myself." Alain drew closer to the ex-Gryffindor and her parents who were relaxing in the Delacour beach side condominium Emma and Daniel chose to spend their holiday in.

"As I was saying to your parents, we have an opportunity to do a bit of travel a few days from now... to Switzerland. There will be an International Confederation of Wizards meeting in Bern on the 21st and our presence has been requested by the committee in charge."

"Are they finally doing something about the Third Task? How about the slanderous rubbish that the Daily Prophet continues to spout about us?"

Emma was beginning to fear returning to England now that the paper has built their daughter into an icon in Magical England's deluded world view. Speculation on whether Harry Potter could have rescued her were he still alive has been competing with supposition as to how she could repay whichever fine pureblood Lord succeeds in saving her. Of course, as a mere muggleborn, marriage into a pureblood line is too good for her but no one seems to think Hermione's chastity will be important after her rescue.

"Sadly the I.C.W.'s investigation into the Third Task has run its course. Neither the English Ministry nor Dumbledore are willing to release any information which would help explain who the abductor was or why he acted. I can't imagine what's worse... that it could be incompetence on the part of their aurors or a cover-up.

"As for your second question, the I.C.W. does not have authority in cases of slander... all we can do is fine or disrupt the local distribution for slights on my family. I dare say there are no English magical barristers who would consider taking the Prophet to court on your behalf as they tend to ignore the rights of non-magical citizens at every opportunity.

"No, this is about two Englishmen who were detained at Calais recently. French aurors recently picked up a man who is wanted for terrible crimes back in his home country. Due to political concerns, he will be questioned by an I.C.W panel to determine the his future. I and my family must attend as we are indirectly involved. Hermione must attend as she is directly implicated in some of his claims. Emma, Daniel... I'm guessing you do not want your daughter to see Switzerland without you?"

Excitement quickly replaced curiosity on Hermione's face as the list of dangerous criminals she had personal contact with was extremely short.

"You mean Sirius, don't you? He got out of England? How wonderful!"

"What are you talking about young lady? Sirius Black is a deadly criminal. Wait... how does a deranged killer know my little girl?" Alain was surprised at Daniel's reaction.

"Oh! I haven't told you about Third Year have I, Dad? Mum?" All Hermione got was two frightened and confused looks in return.

"I'm sorry Dad, but it looks like I've still left out a few things about Hogwarts and Harry..." Hermione saw Alain's amused look and only just realized how many of her stories were told to the Delacours and not her own parents. She also began to wonder just how much Harry's Godfather told the local aurors. "He... he didn't say anything about a hippogriff, did he?"

"Something about a girl and a boy and a plot to help an escaped serial killer escape again... or were you thinking about two young teens riding a magical winged beast in a way that was terribly romantic?"

"He said our ride on Buckbeack looked romantic?" Blood boiled up to tint the embarrassed girl's complexion. She was far too engrossed in asking herself why she and Harry didn't snog right there on Buckbeack's back to even hear her dad's next question. His voice was just a warm droning noise in the background as she began to realize that those trashy romance novels she's become addicted to don't even compare to the intimacy and danger that she's already experienced with Harry... before or after his death.

"Hermione!" Emma practically shouted into her daughter's ear.

"What?" Hermione hadn't quite lost that flushed look. "Right. Well... I may not have told you everything about Third Year just yet. I'll tell you all about it after we hear about Bern and the I.C.W. panel."

Daniel tried to draw his daughter's gaze, but she was busy looking anywhere but at Mum and Dad. And she was still quite red.

"Are you telling me that the year that you were attacked by those soul sucking demons, you also helped a dangerous criminal escape?"

"Sirius is innocent! He was tossed into Azkaban without a trial! Peter Pettigrew was the one responsible for those muggle deaths and the betrayal of the Potters! Even the Lestranges got put on trial and Bellatrix openly admitted her crimes." Hermione looked at her parents hoping to find something positive. All she saw was two people who clearly were having trouble with how dangerous their daughter's life really was.

"There may have been some time travel in there somewhere too. Just, like, one or two hours on any given day, mind you... it's not like I redid whole years or anything..." Where was Harry when she really needed him? Hermione didn't want to have to explain this by herself.

"I think I'll take that drink now, Alain." Emma knew her daughter lived in a world not too distant from Make Believe, but she didn't know that Hermione also guest starred on Dr. Who and The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes.

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Albus Dumbledore stared into the fireplace within his private quarters in Hogwarts Castle and let his mind drift.

Plans within plans were well underway but it all seemed too little too late in the Headmaster's mind. Every few days, he would confer with his Potions Master and ask for any news on Tom's secretive movements, not that Severus ever spoke in more than general terms. Snape would identify a new victim on occasion and remark how horrible their death was. He would also remark on just how

easy it was to pin these crimes on Sirius Black... or more recently some unnamed French assailant which The Daily Prophet assures its readers is a Dark Lady. Germany had Grindelwald. England had Tom Riddle. It's France's turn, right? The Daily Prophet would have their readers believe that the Delacours are building a dark army of half-breeds and magical creatures and no notable English voices appear to be challenging their claims.

Albus now saw that this anti-French sentiment was getting out of hand, but he was at a loss as to how he could curtail it. Something big would have to happen to turn attention back to the real danger... but, alas. Tom was far too careful to allow anyone to catch wind of his tireless work.

During Snape's most recent meeting with Albus, the reformed Death Eater revealed a truly frightening nugget of information.

The notorious murderer Black is going to be eclipsed in violence and terror by this French Dark Lady. Snape almost reverently described to the Headmaster a private meeting in which Tom had his epiphany while reading Rita Skeeter's most recent rumor laden piece on Potter and his French hosts.

'Why fight for control out in the open like a Gryffindor would,' Tom was heard to say, 'when we can take London secretly as the light loving fools are lead to slaughter on foreign shores?'

Albus shivered for a moment. He had seen the respect Severus afforded Tom in seeking to turn his enemies upon another foe. No. Severus was fully turned from the dark; Dumbledore knew this to be true... so much depended on it.

A soft chime sounded.

"Mimsey."

POP

"Headmaster calls for Mimsey?" The diminutive female in a Hogwarts crest adorned napkin-toga bowed low before her master.

"Please retrieve my owl post."

POP

Albus only had to wait a moment for the same house elf to reappear.

POP

Mimsey lovingly held out a single parchment scroll with a familiar red wax seal. Albus ignored his elf in favor of cracking open the I.C.W. notice. Mimsey disappeared quietly as Albus read the call to Bern for a formal inquiry and extradition hearing.

"Oh, Sirius. I suppose I should have expected something like this... you going after Pettigrew in eighty-one and all. Why ever did I not put tracking charms on you or surveillance charms on Grimmauld Place? Moody would tell me I've gone soft." Albus pulled himself out of the intricately charmed chair and began walking back to his office. "Is that what happened to you, my friend? Finally zagged when you should have zigged?"

Without Mad-Eye Moody at his side, Albus would have a hard time filling the old auror's wartime assignments. Perhaps Shackbolt... but he was still too soft. Were there no Auror Captains left who could still be counted on to serve the light in secret? This was one thing he could not lean on Severus for no matter how good the Potions Master would be at it. Only so many hours in the day after all.

By the time Albus was back in his office and standing half way between his desk and his floo connected fireplace, a bit of inspiration struck. He looked at the notice again.

"... Sirius Black, Remus Lupin, and related material witnesses..." Why, that could mean Miss Granger. And with Alain Delacour being a likely representative for the French contingent, why, his daughter's and Harry may even find their way to Bern.

Albus began to scan his office looking for something that could be a useful bargaining chip with his missing student. He needed some way to remind her that Hogwarts was her future.

Albus needed new pieces on the board to replace his recent losses. He needed Hermione Granger. He needed Harry Potter... dead or alive, it made no difference now. Albus was beginning to think he needed Gabrielle Delacour, though for the life of him he could see

no way to peacefully secure the girl's future attendance at Hogwarts. He was quite done with blood magic wards such as were used to lock young Harry in a symbiotic relationship with his aunt at 4 Privet Drive... to do something similar with Gabrielle and Hogwarts was tempting, but risky in so many ways. He should at least wait for some hint of what the young child's role could be in the bloody conflict to come.

Blood wards. Privet Drive. Potter. He had his bargaining chip. A page or two from Lilly (Evans) Potter's private journal and its wealth of research and family history would surely turn heads. Yes, he would copy just enough of the journal to whet their appetites while still proving useless and hand them over as a show of good faith for the future. A future where those with the energy and power to defeat the Dark Lord followed his guidance. They would follow his guidance as he was the only one alive with knowledge and experience enough to counter Tom and his followers.

There was much to be done. Albus took a pinch of floo powder and tossed it into the fireplace.

"Severus Snape's Office!"

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July 21st, 1995

Emma Granger was quickly coming to the conclusion that she and her husband now had a second option for holiday travel, assuming their first option didn't become a permanent home soon anyway. Bern was a delightful city. While neither she nor her husband spoke German or the true local dialect, their English and French was enough for the elder Grangers to amuse themselves as Hermione attended the scheduled I.C.W. hearings soon to be underway.

"My word, they've gone and put a McDonalds on the same block as the Zytglogge. That clock tower's centuries old and just so... why would they do a thing like that, you think, Emma?" Emma turned to look at her husband's discovery.

"Well, I suppose even the Swiss want the opportunity to ruin their diets like the rest of us. Alain said something about the I.C.W. being under the clock tower, so I suppose even wizards could walk over

for a quick lunch break... assuming their little friends can't reproduce fast food and take away menus exactly. I bet Dobby could... he and Virginie are both quite good in the kitchen." Emma had yet to notice the food choices available as she was fully focused on all of the shopping she planned to torture her husband with in the coming hours.

"What do you think, Em?" Emma stopped. Her husband didn't tend to use her pet name unless the conversation were serious or they were... in congress.

"About going back?"

The two had already made special arrangements at their dental practice to keep them in France as long as possible, but they would have to head home soon if they were going to at all.

"I don't see how we can avoid it, Em. We aren't so well off as to retire early and I don't think we can just re-establish a practice in France as much as the idea appeals to me. No... we have to go back." Dan didn't want to have this conversation, but it needed to be had.

"I agree, Dan. It's just... maybe we can move to another home. You heard Hermione earlier. She said they usually track muggleborn students to their homes due to the magic they release. Harry was behind wards at his Aunt's house, but what about his school? His uncle's office? I don't think that the purebloods in charge would have any idea what it is we do for a living, let alone how to find us doing it." Emma looked into a high end clothing store's front window. That dress would look wonderful on Hermione.

"You're right of course, dear. Alain has already mentioned that he could help speed up the process, whatever we chose to do. Luckily his ministry has more contacts in the non-magical world than ours does. We'll get a buyer in short order so all we need is a new home... something we can look for from hotel rooms if need be." Daniel looked at his wife. The decision was made. Now if only the specter of convincing Hermione that their holiday was over would not weigh them down so much as they continued to see the sights.

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"Your wand, sir." The Swiss I.C.W. guards all knew French. Living in such an international hub tended to make one multilingual.

"Of course." Alain relinquished his wand... twenty-eight centimeters, stone pine encasing a Veela hair core. While he had his theories, no one could prove a relationship between Monsieur Delacour's wand core and his chosen life-mate. The Veela who donated that hair was not related to Apolline's bloodline in the least.

"Thank you, sir." The wand passed security as he knew it would. "The wards have been altered to accept Monsieur Potter, but only for the next hour. Please conduct your business before that deadline."

"Thank you." One man and one ghost passed the last checkpoint between the 'public' I.C.W. circulation spaces and the secured rooms. Two more doors and two more wand checks later, Alain found the door he wanted and knocked.

"Err... come in?" A confused and perhaps amused voice called from the other side of the door.

If Harry Potter had a heart to beat any more, it would be revving at high speed. Damn, but he missed his heartbeat. Not even in the dreams of his girls could Harry's heart be suffered to function.

Alain opened and then stepped past the dull steel door to Sirius Black's holding cell. Harry, still holding on to customs he followed only out of habit, looked over Alain's shoulder without trying to float around or through the man.

"Monsi- Harry! It's you! It's really you! Oh, Merlin- I'm so sorry, Harry!" Sirius Black was staring ultimate failure in the face. First, in Nineteen eighty-one and again in Nineteen ninety-five... he had failed his godson and by extension James and Lilly. Failed them horribly... and the ghost of Harry Potter was here to prove that one does not have to die to burn in Hell.

Sirius didn't cry. He fell to his knees and wept.

"It's going to be alright Sirius. You'll see." Harry floated over to the broken man, a man who withstood over a decade in the harsh halls

of Azkaban only to fall apart at the one sight no dementor had ever been able to show him.

"Bu- but how?" Sirius tried to look Harry in the eye but couldn't. "I would have died for you! Should have. I would have been happy to die knowing I could tell your parents I'd done my best. Oh, James... Merlin... James and Lilly are going to tear me apart when I finally cross over. It's what I deserve, Harry."

"Sirius... it's not that bad-"

"I wanted to watch the tasks Harry, but Dumbledore said it was too risky. First Hagrid takes you from me on Dumbledore's orders and then his fucking fish-friends take you from me when I can't even look over you. Fucking... I'm so sorry." The international prisoner coughed up some phlegm and spat it at his I.C.W. provided toiletries. "I'm worthless. Hell, where's a dementor when you need one?"

"Now, now. Mister Black, we have need of you. Harry here needs you still." Alain understood that only Harry could really save this man but he could lead Harry on the path to this pureblood Lord's recovery. "Harry may be dead, but he is not done with this Earth. He needs you alive and functional."

"Alain's right, Padfoot. I do need you... now more than ever." Harry moved in front of Sirius. The next time he looked up, they'd be eye to eye. "There are things that need doing, Padfoot. Damsels in distress that need saving. Even if I knew how to move on, I wouldn't. I couldn't leave Gabby and Hermione to fate."

"What do you mean, pup?" He couldn't look up, but he could listen.

"I've been thinking, Sirius. Don't say it!" That wasn't a smile on his godfather's face, but Harry had seen enough of a smirk to guess the next joke. "Anyway... I've been thinking, and I've come to the conclusion that whatever I had that made my life so bloody dangerous was infectious."

Sirius looked up for that. He looked confused, for that matter Alain did too, but at least Sirius did look his godson in the eye.

"You don't see it?" Sirius shook his head. "Let me explain then. Weird things always happened to me ever since I was one. The

attack that took my parents. An unblockable spell bouncing right off my head. You got infected that night what with Wormtail and Azkaban. Sorry about that. Hermione's first exposure to me was on the Express for the first time, but she got infected when I saved her from the troll. Her life's been downhill ever since... bloody dementors won't leave her alone. And look what I did to Gabby."

"You saved her life, Harry" Alain had to point it out. It was only fair.

"And now look at her life since then. I marked her. My own government wants to burn her at the stake and they want to take her wand as a prize. She's got my bloody title... the 'Who Lived' part of it anyway. Oh, and the dementors again. That's one recurring theme I can do without. Honestly. With any luck, Jeanne will be immune on account of her already being dead."

Sirius saw an opening and took it. "Jeanne? Who's the new girl, Harry? Does Hermione have anything to worry about?"

Harry looked over to Alain and smirked.

"New girl, he says..." And now to prove that Padfoot was as infected as anyone else... "You still think you need to pay for your sins? Would you like to earn some redemption, Padfoot? I have a job for you."

"Anything, pup. Anything."

"Hermione needs more protection than I can give her, Sirius. She's in the spotlight now and I can't beat on trolls like I used to. 'Mione could use an English pureblood Lord to hide behind... someone that can keep the political wolves at bay and hex those what need a good hexing. And by wolves I mean the English Ministry of Magic and Dumbledore."

"What's Dumbledore done to- Wait. Never mind. I'll do it, pup." It didn't matter why. Harry wanted Sirius to do it and that's all that mattered.

"Harry can tell you all about it after you're free. That's our goal, by the way... you may not get freedom in England but Europe should be safe for you by the end of the day." Alain took up the torch. "We should be able to force Bones or Dumbledore to act in England if the

I.C.W. clears you. If not, you'll just have to learn to live in comfort surrounded by the beauty of the French Riviera."

Sirius seemed to think about his options. "Cold England with few topless women or warm France with lots of them, eh? Maybe being a fugitive can add to my 'bad boy' image, yeah? Girls like that, don't they, Harry?"

Harry smiled. "That's what I hear, mate. Hermione was all prim and proper until I showed her how to break the rules. Just remember she's mine."

Sirius held up his hands in mock surrender and smiled. "You win, Harry. She's too young for me anyway, too young as in illegal... now Fleur on the other hand-"

"I'm still in the room, Mister Black." Alain. Fleur's father. Right.

"Oops."

In a larger and better decorated room not too far away from Sirius Black's social embarrassment, a group of English representatives passed through green flames into Bern.

First out of the fire was an unremarkable auror of with brown hair and brown eyes. He was soon joined by a much taller bald auror with dark skin, dark eyes and a smile. A woman came next, one who seemed to radiate authority as strongly as Minerva McGonagall despite being much younger than the ex-Deputy Headmistress. Her brown hair was pulled back into a severe bun leaving navy blue eyes as her most notable feature set on a face that was only just beginning to show wrinkles due to tension and age. The fourth and final member of the English contingent stumbled out of the floo reminding anyone who knew Harry Potter in life of his troubles with magical transport. The young woman's eyes darkened in anger and her hair flushed red in embarrassment before settling down to a more respectable color.

"Ah, Madam Bones. So nice to see you in Bern." Albus Dumbledore had been waiting.

Today was not his day to be English, for his role as Supreme Mugwump would not allow him, but he was within his rights to greet

the more important parties. Albus had in fact already spoken to the French contingent and thought himself quite well restrained when Monsieur Delacour did not show up with the official delegation.

"Thank you, Supreme Mugwump. I look forward to making some headway on the Black case after all of these years. Maybe soon real justice can be served." The older woman was the one to address Supreme Mugwump Dumbledore. Amelia Bones.

"Amelia, I hope that we can remain friendly to one another outside of official functions. Please call me Albus." Albus looked across Amelia's security contingent. "Aurors Dawlish, Shacklebolt... and Nymphadora, so nice to see you doing well. I think I will always fondly remember watching your hair cycle through lengths and colors under the Sorting Hat, my dear."

"Auror Tonks, if you please, Headmaster. I'm not eleven anymore." Yet he got to her just the same. Headmaster and not Supreme Mugwump. Albus thought it a point to him though he dare not lend voice to the victory.

"Albus. How long do you expect this to take? How did the French even agree to this? I'm sure the more intelligent wizards outside of England can take the Prophet with a grain of salt, but surely they would seek to humiliate us as much as possible after catching our worst criminal as soon as he stepped foot on French soil." Amelia didn't tend keep her finger on the pulse of international politics, but this wasn't just your every day prisoner transfer.

"I myself am somewhat surprised that they would make this offer so quickly, but I think you will find they still intend to humiliate England to the greatest extent possible in the next day or two, Amelia. You see... the French delegation has submitted a witness list which includes the Delacours, Hermione Granger and our dearly departed Harry Potter." That statement by the old headmaster got the attention of all three English aurors and their department head.

"Potter's going to testify? How does that work?" Amelia had never heard of anyone putting a ghost on the witness stand. The Wizengamot outlawed it centuries ago as you can't give them veritaserum.

In truth, far too many ghosts were eager to testify and identify their murderers before the Wizengamot against Wizengamot members and other prominent pureblood Lords who had in fact done much of the killing. Most impolite of those spirits... thinking that they could get someone in Azkaban just because that person was 'guilty' of the crime. What was the value of a Wizengamot seat if you couldn't use it to subjugate the lesser peoples and send your political enemies to their death?

"You may not know this, but Harry's already testified in France. Of course the results of his testimony were only widely acknowledged outside of English borders. After that one run of the Daily Prophet the day after the Third Task, Fudge and his operatives effectively took control of the Prophet and the English Wizarding Wireless Network. Why, I don't doubt that even if Sirius Black were cleared of all charges and set free here in Bern, Fudge would still want him kissed." Amelia and her guards all saw Albus's famous eye twinkle work its magic during his last comment. Wait...

"You don't expect me to believe that they would really let him go, do you? He betrayed the Potters! Killed all those muggles... he deserves to be kissed."

"Did he? Does he?" With that, Albus made his excuses and left four confused and alarmed English magicals to be checked in for their role... possible role... of prisoner transfer detail.

"I think I need to smoke on it." John Dawlish was the first to speak.

"Go ahead, John. Make it quick though, we've got about half an hour before the morning session begins."

Amelia nodded to the unassuming veteran auror who didn't have to be told twice. He's been here as Department Head escort and on prisoner transfer duty before and knows very well where the best rooms for an auror to take a short break were located. As long as he didn't come back drunk, a bit of tobacco use on the job was still acceptable.

It really was a beautiful morning, not that the I.C.W. meeting attendees all knew this as most of them would end up using the floo or a portkey to reach the underground magical international offices. Still those few who did poke their heads outside and walked the

streets of Bern would feel refreshed before returning to their assigned tasks.

Unless, of course, one's assigned task was to assemble in the middle of an old forest some fifty kilometers away tucked tightly between two steep mountains. Six men had such a task. Their seventh, as seven was a magically powerful number, would get them in the building and guide them to the target. One of the rough and dangerous looking men looked into the sky. Yes. Today was a good day for schadenfreude. It was time. As one, six cloaked figures checked their wands, blades and potions and grabbed the portkey. Ten seconds later, they disappeared without so much as a pop.

"It's about time, you lot. Follow me." Sure, it sounded common, but then code phrases shouldn't draw attention to the ones speaking them. The proper counter was to remain silent and follow until they were indoors.

After stepping in through a rough, banged up 'Employees Only' door covered in muggle repelling wards, the group of seven walked down one hall up a flight of stairs and into a storage room half full of tables, chairs and random items of heraldry.

"Right. The original target is in the building, but a better option has come up." John Dawlish pulled a map of the I.C.W. building out of his robes and unrolled it onto the table. "You should now think of Black as a secondary target."

One of the faceless cloaked men spoke up in an accent John couldn't quite place. Damn mercenaries and hit-wizards grow up. Merlin knows where. "We came here for Black. You want us to hit someone else, make it worth our while."

"My associates are willing to pay as much for each Delacour woman and Hermione Granger alive as Black is worth dead. Each of the witches dead is worth half as much as alive." The six hired hands looked towards each other and began to chatter back and forth in a language that sounded like German to Dawlish, but he couldn't be sure.

"How hard are they going to be to get to?" The spokesman of the group was addressing him again.

"Easier than Black. There will be more people to walk through but only one checkpoint in front of the witness room. Do it right and you'll catch them in a portkey enabled room." John pointed to where they were and where their two different targets were on the map. One checkpoint would be much easier than three and change.

There was another quick discussion between John's guests before the spokesman turned one last time.

"Agreed. We will hit the witness room instead of taking Black when they bring him out of the secure cells."

John nodded to the head of the group, re-rolled and stowed his map and began to walk back to the storeroom door.

"I need to get back to my post. My Ministry will eventually catch heat for this, but they-"

John's departure was cut short as a young woman with spiky green hair, dark eyes and English auror's robes pushed through the door.

"John! What's taking.. you..." Nymphadora seized up upon seeing a group of cloaked men right behind her partner for the day.

Red light filled the young auror's vision before she fell to the floor unconscious.

"Bloody... they probably saw that in the security office! We'll have to rush it or forget the whole thing." John knew that their window of opportunity was half of what it had been... if they were lucky.

"I'm not leaving without earning some gold." The spokesman raised his wand again. "Avada-"

"Wait! She's a metamorph. We can use her." John held the mercenary back. True, she was only a half-blood, but she was a metamorphmagus and you don't just banish them along with the rest of the garbage.

"Imperio. Ennervate." Tonks stood up and immediately took point ahead of the men. This just might work in their favor.

Back in the holding cells. Alain and Harry were speaking with the only good Defense professor Harry knew that didn't follow a Dark Lord.

"And so James steps up behind Lilly and Alice and says 'what do you mean late? You've never been late for anything since you were born.' Sweet Merlin, Harry. The best prank anyone ever played on your father and it wasn't a prank at all. It was you!" Remus Lupin laughed harder than he had since last summer... maybe even before that, before James and Lilly were killed?

Harry was giggling as Alain watched on in amusement. The boy needed more of this. Perhaps the Delacour family might have work available for one who is... close to nature?

All merriment stopped when a severe looking Swiss guard entered the cell.

"Messieurs. Dark magic has been released within the building. Please leave the holding area."

Alain's amused look fell to a stronger all business image, Harry tried to regain his breath only to find that it was unnecessary.

"Perhaps I should head back to the girls, Alain? I'll keep an eye on yours for you." Harry stretched out in the ghost equivalent of standing up.

"Please do so, Harry. They are priceless to me... all of them."

"As they are to me as well, Sir. Perhaps we can get the full set back together soon. I do so look forward to what Segolene will do to 'Mione's old uniform. See you later, Moony." Harry put a balled fist over his heart and bowed. Seconds later, he disappeared, leaving Alain to use less exotic means of transport to attend to his assigned duties. He walked.

Remus thought to himself as the door to his cell closed. 'Is this how it always starts? Laughter and danger and the questionable safety of a young maiden?' Remus gave Harry good odds for some real heroics to happen in the next half hour. Would the goblins cover heroic feats of daring-do, or would they consider them too risky to book?

Gabrielle was bored.

Hermione was reading. Fleur was reading. Momma was reading. Gabby had a book in her hands, but it was boring. Why couldn't something fun and exciting happen?

"Hey, Gabby!" Wasn't there some bible verse about asking and receiving or something?

"Harry!" "Harry!"

Harry pouted a little. Only two out of four greeted him properly with smiles and everything. Fleur and her mother both just nodded in his direction. Maybe next time. At least Gabby was bouncing in place with enough energy to make up for Fleur and Apolline's properly subdued reactions.

"Ladies. Look, I'm here early becau-"

Harry stopped when he saw the door behind Hermione open. A young woman wearing a Swiss auror cloak looked around for a moment before setting her sights on Apolline and walking right up to the Veela mother's side.

"Can I help you? Are we being called early?" Apolline looked into the woman's eyes. Her answer was not what anyone was expecting.

"Stupefy."

Hermione, Fleur, Gabrielle and Harry all stared in shock as their minds fell to the floor unconscious. Fleur and Hermione both reached for their wands, but it was too late. Too late and they were pointing the wrong way.

Red light filled the room as four more wordless stunners flashed from the doorway and sent both Fleur and Hermione to the floor. Four men entered the room. One of them was wearing English auror's robes and the other three were wearing common black cloaks.

"Potter!" Harry was about to move... to do something when the auror barked out his name. "Don't move and don't go away! The minute I can't see you one of these bitches dies. They die, do you understand?"

Harry shakily nodded. Sometimes being a ghost wasn't really worth all that much.

"Tonks! Catch." Auror Dawlish tossed a gold coin at the woman who stunned Apolline. As she caught it, her Swiss auror cloak slid off Tonks' shoulders to reveal a bloodied English cloak under it. "It's a portkey. Take the little girl with you."

Tonks grabbed Gabby's arm, causing the girl to snap out of her own confused and panicked silence.

"Let go of me and go away!"

Gabby jerked and swatted Tonks' arm, sending the golden portkey flying through the air to bounce off an empty chair a few meters away. The little Veela kicked Tonks in the shin and dove under a table before a stupefy could tag her on the ass. A thin, beautiful and powerful wooden shaft slid in front of her face, dangling on a golden chain. She reached out and grasped it.

"Get up or yer Mum dies, little girl!"

Frightened beyond reason, Gabby got up with wand in hand.

"You're mean! You need to leave!" Gabrielle's little heart was hammering away inside her chest. Momma and Fleur and Hermione were sleeping. These mean men were getting closer to her family. Harry couldn't help her. What could she do?

"We don't have time for another round you little chit. Tonks is going to summon..."

Gabby wasn't listening. Her pulse was booming in her ears blocking out everything else. These men were going to do bad things to her, her Momma, her sisters and maybe even Harry too. She heard what the man told Harry. She also remembered that she had cousins, an aunt and a grand aunt that were taken by bad men and never seen again. Gabby looked into Harry's eyes. What would Harry do?

As the angry bad man continued to talk, Gabby and Harry looked each other. Gabby poured uncertainty and fear into her eyes. Harry, she saw, returned her gaze with one she'd seen before. It was the face Harry wore seconds before he died.

Gabby's face changed to match his.

"... now, take Tonks' hand, little girl." John Dawlish had finished messing around with this girl. It didn't matter how many galleons she was worth if she held them up too long to collect. His career was already shot... until certain changes occurred... and no damned half-breed princess was going to send him to Azkaban.

As Harry disappeared from the visible world, Gabby felt him appear deep in her heart. Newfound courage pushed against the mind numbing fear of fighting bad men.

'You give me strength, Harry.' "I HATE YOU!"

Gabrielle's shriek was matched by a sharp left to right jerk of her Harry wand. That and a whole mountain of intent. She could protect her family. She could!

Four men, all of them casting vengeful attack magic at the uppity child, were tossed to Gabrielle's right like dolls in a hurricane. Four men hit the wall in a huge shower of cloth and glass shards and splinters... and fire.

Bright blue-white flames snapped into existence inside Gabby's conjured winds and ate through the cloaks and robes of the four men who had dared to threaten her family.

"I HATE YOU SOOOO MUCH!"

She jerked her wand once more and two men who were nearly back on their feet fell again to the firestorm of a righteously angry Little Angel.

Nymphadora Tonks stood by Gabby motionless. The magical chains of mind control weakened and crumbled as their caster became a victim of a far more obvious command: die in fire. Had Tonks been capable of independent thought, she would have blown a mental

circuit or three watching as an eight year old Veela crushed four auror-level skilled wizards. More than that... the eight year old just stood there as four dark, angry curses flew unerringly into her chest. Purple, red and yellow magical bolts slid over the girl like oil on water and impacted somewhere behind her.

'Gabrielle.' Harry. That was Harry. 'Your father is almost here. You'll be safe soon.'

The silver-blond haired girl stood still, wand raised high, as blue-white magical flame burned in a wall before her. The women of her family all lay motionless on the floor at her feet as wood, glass, cloth and flesh was consumed by her spell.

Water. Suddenly water was everywhere.

"Gabrielle!"

Poppa?

"Poppa?"

There was motion through the fires. Water was winning the battle. Men were coming into the room to save her. Amidst a group of Swiss guards, she could just make out her Poppa.

"Harry! Poppa! I'm scared!"

Gabby began to wail as the fires lowered and strong arms wrapped her tightly about the waist. Harry did what he could to fill the wailing girl's heart with love and pride through heart and soul as Poppa smothered her with love and protection from without.

A pair of stunners bored into the witch standing to Gabrielle's side as Tonks was finally showing signs of awareness.

"You did so good, my Little Angel. You saved everyone. Such a big, big girl you are." Alain let the Swiss guard following him into the room continue to douse the flames as he picked up his crying little girl. Alain came so close to losing everything today and Little Angel saved it all.

More Swiss guards poured into the room to put down the fire and clear damage. Three unconscious witches were levitated under heavy guard to a medical station, a nervous and shaky ghost zipping between Gabby and each floating witch scanned for even the slightest of injuries, real or imagined.

The hearing would be postponed twenty-four hours to regain order and to tighten security. They would do this again, but not today.

The I.C.W. would release information stating that seven or eight attackers including at least one English auror attempted to kidnap witnesses at Sirius Black's hearing and that three people were detained and five dead after the attackers killed three guards and wounded three witnesses and one guard. This would be released to news agencies later in the evening, but for now, security and cleanup were more important than a press conference.

-o\O/o-

Auror John Dawlish opened his eyes. They hadn't detained him yet... why hadn't they done that? No matter, he could still make his way out of the building if he was quiet enough.

The auror pulled himself out of the burnt rubble which had once been a well appointed waiting room and squinted his eyes to see through the smokey haze and poor lighting.

"You're awake. Good for you."

John snapped his wand around to cover... Harry Potter?

"Potter! Don't make any sudden moves." Potter, if it was Potter, just smiled and held out two empty hands.

To be honest, auror Dawlish was more than a little concerned that the Boy-Who-Failed looked alive and kicking. How the bloody hell did Potter accomplish that? Did someone polyjuice into him as a prank? Well John wasn't laughing.

"We're getting out of here, Potter, and you're coming with me. No funny stuff or I'll curse you straight to Hell."

"You mustn't joke of such things John." Potter wasn't smiling anymore. "You should think really carefully about what you're doing, John... and how you got here. This is important."

John had a really bad feeling about this, but forced his growing fear to the back of his mind. If he could just get out of this situation in one piece... he might be able to salvage the cocked up attack.

"Why are you here, Potter, and not someone else? Why isn't this room filled with aurors?"

Harry seemed to look around before sticking his hands in his pockets.

"This is your big chance, John. Your chance to explain things or to make an effort to turn around. As for why I'm here? I volunteered." Harry's face dropped into a glare. "You went after my girls, John. I'm not happy with you... not happy at all."

John kept ignoring the horrible wrongness of the situation in an effort to turn things to his advantage.

"Shut it, Potter!" A scarred and pitted wand drew even with Harry's eyes. "We are going to walk out of this room until we get to someplace a portkey will work... and then we're going to go on a little trip to Jolly Old England... and then you're going to say hello to a man that you upset terribly when you were twelve. I hope you enjoyed getting your body back, Potter, because I don't doubt your new host is going to yank your ghost right back out of it again."

"You don't understand..."

"Reduc-" Auror John Dawlish's blasting curse was silenced just before he could finish the incantation, his scarred and pitted wand clattered to the floor with no wizard to hold it.

Harry frowned. He gave John more time than he deserved to turn around and John went and pissed it all away.

"To Hell with you, John."

-o\O/o-

Albus Dumbledore stepped through a charred and pock marked door frame to view the devastation still present from the unpleasantness before lunch.

Remarkable. He could see why the local Unspeakables, or whatever Switzerland chose to call them, insisted of doing a thorough sweep of the room before any elves were called in to set it to rights. The room was singing with fire magic even hours after the last flames were extinguished. If he had to hazard a guess, Albus would say that this must be the magical signature of a Veela fueled blaze.

Now for his own research.

The Supreme Mugwump raised his wand and began to conduct a magical orchestra of charms and other spells... all designed to soak up the information hidden within a room and make it plain to his sight. He flicked and twisted and swished until the information was also compiled in a time index of sorts.

Now for the review... Albus concentrated and watched as colors swirled and danced within the cut glass of his spectacles. Four females to begin with, three of them Veela. No surprises as the old man was familiar with all four magical signatures and it was common knowledge as to who was supposed to be in the room... or at least it was common knowledge to important players in this morning's drama.

Miss Granger, you break an old man's heart. Only just this morning had he heard from a very boastfull Madame Maxime that Miss Granger had no intention of stepping foot inside of Hogwarts before taking her N.E.W.T.s; she would be a Beauxbatons girl this coming year. Something would have to be done to make her see reason and abandon this foolish idea of a transfer. As her magical guardian, Albus would return his lost lamb to the flock as soon as he was able. It was imperative that such a high profile student return with her peers on the First of September. Hogwarts needed Hermione Granger and as the school's headmaster, he would show Hermione that she needed Hogwarts just as much.

Auror Tonks enters, approaches the Delacour mother and attacks her. Now why would young Nymphadora do that? Albus hoped he would be allowed to attend her interrogation, but his country of origin

would trump his station for this investigation. The I.C.W. was well within its rights to suspect even him... at least in the short term.

Ahhh. Enter Auror Dawlish and a group of men he did not know. So that's where the missing English auror went. No good can come of this... it's bad enough that an English auror is being held prisoner. The Prophet will go crazy when they learn that Dawlish died here.

What this? A touch of Veela fire strengthened by... Oh, my. Such a spell has never played out before his eyes in his very long life. And it was cast by young Gabrielle with Potter's wand! Do they realize what this means? No! Of course they don't. Only Albus could... or perhaps Voldemort too if he learned of this.

This was too much to hope for... and yet how could he ensure her cooperation? The girl's upbringing has nothing in common with Harry's... no suffering to sharpen her resolve except for Harry's own death. And she was French. Albus had no legitimate excuse to take her under his wing. Why, the Delacours now had several legitimate excuses to stay far away from Hogwarts and England. Even if her parents were to drop dead tomorrow, he had no toe-hold with which to assume guardianship of the child.

Perhaps he would try once, at least once, to make them see the necessity of this move in a positive and non-threatening way. It wasn't just England that needed Gabrielle now... it was the whole of the Wizarding World that would fall if she were not present to... do what must be done.

The prophecy was not negated, was it? No, it was merely transferred. Merlin bless Harry Potter for being selfless enough to provide the rest of us an escape from Tom Riddle's dark reign. Merlin help them all if Albus Dumbledore can't convince little Gabrielle Delacour that she must face Tom Riddle. She must face the Dark Lord and die by his wand for the prophecy to be satisfied.

Albus was sure of it now.

End Chapter

Chapter Eight: Incubation

CRACK - Booom

Harry looked out Gabrielle's bedroom windows. A storm was brewing.

It had been months since Gabby had a real nightmare, one that Harry wasn't able to minimize or deflect, but she would get little relief tonight. Harry did whatever he could to lessen the effects and prayed that Hermione wasn't similarly affected. Gabrielle wasn't moving and he wasn't leaving her either.

As lighting hammered Gabby's dreamworld from above. Burning men trudged along the grounds outside, passing through blue-white fires that seemed to be slowly consuming the landscape around her family home. Thunder shook the windows once again causing the little ball of Veela to flinch harder against her one anchor, her one shield against the horrible burning monster-men.

Harry looked down to the little girl in his lap. He tried to, anyway; there were two sheets and a comforter on top of the girl providing what comfort one could get from simply not being able to see her worst memory over and over and over again in the fields beneath her bedroom window.

How many times had he been in this position himself? How many times had he buried his head under covers and plead desperately to any God listening that someone would make Voldemort go away? The Basilisk? Dementors?

Harry couldn't hug her tight in the waking world, but he could do it here. He figured he was worthless in Bern and it hurt him deep inside. John yelled one sentence and put Harry out of the fight until an eight year old girl summoned the will to attack professional killers. If only there were something or some way to defend his girls physically... some way like how Peeves does his... pranks...

Peeves.

He was dead. He was a ghost like Harry. Peeves knew how to touch things like in that movie, Ghost. Just maybe, Harry might go drop by Myrtle's loo a little earlier than he ever expected to.

Harry wouldn't fail his Little Angel again. In the innermost core of Gabrielle's dreaming mind, Harry swore to protect her from those who would hurt her, no matter who they were.

"I've got you Gabby. I've got you and I'll never let you go."

Gabby replied with a pitifully weak whimper, "... I'm so scared... ...they'll get me, don't let them get me..."

"They will never get you. Never."

"...love you Harry..."

"I love you Little Angel. I love you soooooooo much."

"...please don't let them get me..."

Of course, there are advantages to being dead. Little Angel needed her guardian angel from the moment her head hit the pillow to the moment she was kissed awake by her Momma. Harry's unlimited patience along with pure devotion held the monsters at bay all night. He could have comforted her like this for hours more... days more... even years more if she needed him to.

It wasn't needed. She woke up.

Bern again today. Maybe it wouldn't be so bad this time.

-o\O/o-

"State your name."

"Nymphadora Tonks."

The room was clean and brightly lit. "Occupation."

"Auror for the British Ministry of Magic."

Simple white walls separated the prisoner and the interrogator from the distractions of everyday life.

"How long have you been an auror?"

"Qualified in Nineteen ninety-four. I've been on active duty for fourteen months."

Aside from a complete lack of doors and windows, the room could have passed for a police interrogation room anywhere in the non-magical world.

"Explain your assignment yesterday."

"Escort detail. I was to escort Amelia Bones to Bern and then back to our Ministry. We also assumed that Black would be coming back with us for a public execution in London."

The interrogator, who was either American or learned English with an American accent, continued to look into his prisoner's eyes. There was a non-magical notepad and pencil in front of him but he ignored the props as soon as Auror Tonks was brought in by portkey.

"Why did you assault I.C.W. guards?"

"I don't remember attacking I.C.W. guards."

"Why did you attack the witnesses for Sirius Black's hearing?"

"I don't remember attacking any witnesses."

"What do you remember?"

"I remember being told by Madam Bones to retrieve Auror Dawlish so that we could take our seats in the courtroom. I went down the hallway he departed through and I remember opening a few doors without luck. I don't remember finding him. I remember being in a room that was on fire, but I don't remember how I got there or what I was doing there or why it was on fire."

"Did you come to Bern yesterday planning to attack guards or witnesses?"

"No."

"Did you come to attack Sirius Black?"

"No."

"Did you plan to help free Sirius Black?"

"No. Why would I do that?"

"You are his cousin, are you not?"

"Yes, but everyone knows he betrayed the Potters. I wouldn't help him escape punishment."

On the other side of a notice-me-not ward, several officials continued to observe the interrogation.

"So?"

"It's the same story every time. We've used Veritaserum once already. She volunteered a magical oath to tell the truth just before you came in. We accepted her offer, of course." The man who appeared to be an I.C.W. official turned to his guest. "Our interrogator is also an accomplished legilimens. Any time he sees something in her eyes that betrays her mouth, he will make note of it."

"Has she said anything useful?"

"When asked what unusual people have been in contact with her, she claims that Albus Dumbledore invited her to lunch. Her schedule hasn't allowed the meeting to take place yet."

"The holes in her memory are too big for my comfort. The press is already saying that this is a British attack, but we have no solid evidence yet. Unless you find strong evidence to clear her, I want her extradition hearing to start as soon as Black's is done. It's unlikely that the Supreme Mugwump would be involved, but we should look into it anyway."

"I understand Monsieur Depaul."

-o\O/o-

A door opened.

Every witch and wizard in the room pointed their wand at the I.C.W. guards passing through, even a shaking eight year old Veela. Even their Scottish tutor who would be damned before she let any of those bastards try to take her wee lass away.

"Judge Goethe has requested the presence of Hermione Granger in courtroom two."

Hermione looked over to her parents, Apolline and their French Auror escort. Her parents seemed to reach a new level of tension that Hermione hadn't seen since they first met her after leaving England.

Both the Veela matron and their escort detail's captain seemed to accept the summons at face value and Apolline nodded her assent to Hermione. After requesting two French Aurors to escort Hermione through the halls, Apolline walked over and pulled the tense young witch into a tight hug.

"Do you really think they'll set him free?" Hermione didn't sound anything at all like the confident young woman that Apolline was used to dealing with.

"Stick to the facts and they'll have little choice in the matter."

Hermione hugged back before moving on to her Mum and Dad, getting tight hugs and whispered declarations of love from them both.

Hermione paused one last time before leaving to look at Gabrielle. She couldn't see Harry wishing her luck, but she could feel him looking at her just like she did the night before the Third Task.

Poor Gabby. The one time Harry so much as moved out of her to greet everyone else during breakfast, she fell to the floor and began screaming that 'they' were going to 'get her'. Harry immediately re-entered Gabby and filled her heart with as much love and pride as he could show her, causing the girl to calm down enough to be consoled properly by her Momma. He would gladly play the part of spiritual teddy bear until Gabrielle was ready to stand on her own two feet again.

As the door finally closed behind her, Hermione set her mind back to her part in Sirius Black's hearing. In a way, it would be her own trial

what with Albus Dumbledore and other British officials in the room and asking questions of her.

In fact, there were plenty of things the Headmaster knew she did that wouldn't sit well with the British Ministry of Magic were it to get out in the open. Expulsion would be the least of her troubles if Minister Fudge learned that she and Harry saved both Buckbeak from McNair's ax and Sirius Black from the dementors.

Hermione began to search her memory for logical defenses and possible counter-blackmail against the Headmaster... right as she bumped into the auror in front of her. They'd stopped.

"Your Honor, I present Miss Hermione Granger." As the first I.C.W. guard in line made his announcement, the others stepped to the side.

That was her cue.

As Hermione stepped into the courtroom, she mentally repeated a mantra first coined by Ron Weasley in First Year. I am brilliant but scary. I am brilliant but scary. I am Hermione Granger and I am brilliant but scary.

The soon to be Fifth Year Beauxbatons Academie student looked at the room around her. The room was, though not identical to non-magical court rooms, close enough that the difference was unmistakable. Three judges presided in a raised platform of stained oak at the focal point of a semi-circular room. To the judges' right, Hermione saw a seating area for court officials and clerical workers who busied themselves with note taking and whispered conversations which the judges took no note of. To the judges' left was Hermione herself, in what appeared to be a simple witness's stand. Just in front of the richly stained, rune encrusted stand was a small open floor of perhaps five meters in both width and depth. In the center of the open floor was a shallow black stone bowl upon a matching black stone pillar. The bowl itself was lined in runes inlaid with silver and gold at various points along its faces. After tearing her eyes off of the spectacular example of what could only be a pensieve, Hermione looked out over the curved, elevated rows of seating not unlike what she would expect in a lecture hall or amphitheater.

In the the closest seat of the first row of seats directly in front of her now seemingly very exposed stand, Hermione saw the grandfatherly smile and twinkling eyes of Albus Dumbledore.

"Please be seated Miss Granger." At the nearest judge's prompt, she did so.

"You are a witch born of non-magical parents, are you not Miss Granger?" The judge called out again.

Hermione began to wonder if this rather old looking man with pale skin and long white whiskers was Judge Goethe as he spoke English with a mild German accent.

"Yes Your Honor. My parents are both dentists with no magical ancestry that we're aware of."

"Thank you, Miss Granger. I want you to understand the difference between this courtroom and any other that you may have encountered to date. You may notice that you are surrounded by rune covered wooden panels..." Hermione seemed to nod slightly as the judge pointed to her surroundings, "...these runes will ensure that you are telling the truth so long as you are within the witness stand. They also afford you certain protections, but this isn't that kind of hearing, so I'll not go into detail about such things.

"Now, what we would like from you, Miss Granger, is for you to tell the court what transpired on the evening of June Ninth, Nineteen ninety-four."

All eyes turned to the fifteen year old ex-Gryffindor.

She didn't know what kinds of questions they had asked... or would ask... Sirius about his escape that night. Did they already know she and Harry helped him get out of Hogwarts? Did they already know she helped a doomed animal escape execution? Hermione focused her mind to the task at hand and began to explain things as they went before using the time turner and doubling the number of Hermiones and Harrys that existed on Earth for a three hour period. If she was very lucky, they would not ask about her and Harry's doppelgangers.

"Well... the night went from ordinary to extraordinary as Ron Weasley, Harry Potter and I were leaving Hagrid's hut under the cover of Harry's invisibility cloak. We were trying to be quiet about it as Headmaster Dumbledore, Minister Fudge, and two more ministry officials had just arrived to execute the hippogriff Buckbeak. It was just after we heard the executioner's ax come down that Ron's pet rat Scabbers was spooked by my cat Crookshanks and ran off..."

Hermione being Hermione, her explanation could have filled the better part of a book.

"... was about that time that we came to in the hospital wing to hear Severus Snape take credit for capturing Sirius Black. As Harry and I both knew Sirius was innocent, we tried to convince Minister Fudge that Sirius was innocent and that Snape was wrong. Of course when Snape claimed that we were confounded by Sirius, the Minister believed him right away. I believe it was about this time that Sirius managed to escape confinement and flee the castle before dementors could be brought in to give him the kiss. I, umn... I believe that about covers what you're asking for, Sir."

One of the other judges, a positively ancient looking woman with dark brown skin and a tight bun of white hair responded to Hermione's conclusion.

"We thank you for your testimony, Miss Granger. I believe that I and my colleagues find your description of events to match perfectly with testimony already given by Sirius Black." Hermione's all business expression almost cracked at the relief she felt. They didn't know about the time turner yet! "Are there any questions from the French or English delegations?"

Hermione risked a quick glance to her former Headmaster and found his trademark grandfatherly smile staring right back at her. While she knew she wasn't an expert on reading people, Hermione thought she might have detected a little pride in his smile?

Maybe he wasn't going to torpedo her efforts? Would he want Hermione back in England enough to give the British Department of Magical Law Enforcement a reason to try to extradite her on criminal charges? He did seem keen on keeping Harry on Hogwarts grounds on the night of the Third Task. Well, if the Headmaster did uncover

her time travel adventure, then she'd be sure to tell the court who's idea it all was and also who gave very specific instructions on how to find a temporary prison cell from the outside. His supreme mugwumpness himself, that's who.

Headmaster Dumbledore stood. "If it pleases the panel, I should like to ask the witness if anything pertinent to this investigation happened after the end of her recounting."

The three judge panel was not about to refuse their Supreme Mugwump his request.

"Miss Granger, please respond to Supreme Mugwump Dumbledore's question."

Bloody Hell. If he was going to take her down... well then she wouldn't be going quietly.

Hermione stared down Albus Dumbledore. "After you left us alone, Headmaster, Harry and I did nothing but follow your instructions. Anything else of pertinence occurred in the three or so hours previous."

"Well said, Miss Granger. Of course you and Mister Potter both acquitted yourselves admirably on a night when the adults around you were sadly lacking in judgment and self control. I... I believe that I am satisfied with your testimony."

'Oh, thank God!' Hermione couldn't help but release a great breath that she hadn't even realized she was holding.

Albus chuckled openly at her display. "Hmm. I sympathize with you, Miss Granger. I do believe that giving testimony in such a high profile case can sometimes be as stressful as experiencing the original events themselves. Wouldn't you agree?"

"S-some of them, Sir. Yes." Hermione's face went flush at being caught out by her ex-Headmaster.

"I have no further questions."

Albus took his seat. This time, Hermione maintained tight control of her breathing. As soon as the old man with way too much power was fully seated, a woman near him on the front row stood.

"If it pleases the panel, I would like to make a request of Miss Granger."

"Proceed Madam Bones."

"Miss Granger," Madam Bones was sharp and professional despite losing two of her own aurors in this very building the day before. "I am Amelia Bones, Head of the British Department of Magical Law Enforcement. You and Sirius Black have both testified to a great many things that go against commonly accepted beliefs back in England. I'd like to request a pensieve memory of the night in question that I can use in our own investigations back in London."

"Of course."

"Are there any more questions for Miss Granger? ...No? ...Very well. The witness is excused." Judge Goethe turned to Hermione. "Miss Granger, please leave the witness stand and return to the waiting room."

As she left her chair and turned for the door behind her, Hermione heard the judge call for Alain to come to the stand. Alain stood from his seat in the gallery to take his turn. Upon her return to the waiting room, Hermione took a seat next to Gabrielle who had the sagging eyelids of someone who was in great need of a nap. The little girl immediately dropped her head on Hermione's lap and closed her eyes. Ten minutes later, Hermione followed Gabby's example and nodded off.

-o\O/o-

"Your Honors, I present the prisoner Lord Sirius Black."

Hermione was in the gallery now as were her parents, the Delacours and Mrs. McGonagall. She watched him step through the door she herself had passed through some four hours ago and searched his face for any signs of what he was thinking. Sirius had a warm smile on his face but she didn't think it went all the way to his eyes. Perhaps he thought the I.C.W. might still rule in favor of extradition

in spite of clear evidence that he was not guilty of the crimes Magical Britain sought to punish him for. The central judge cleared his throat.

"Lord Black, in reviewing your case, we, on behalf of the International Confederation of Wizards make the following ruling. First, we find you to be innocent of the crimes you were accused of in your home country of Britain. Extradition to British territory is denied. Second, we find that Magical Britain was negligent in its original handling of your case and we direct the International Confederation of Wizards to publicly censure the British Ministry of Magic for its actions against you. Third, we find that all International Confederation of Wizard member nations shall be directed to grant you free passage across their borders as well as all rights and privileges provided to any free foreign national within their lands."

Before anyone could react in elation or in shock, Judge Goethe spoke up. "Do the representatives from France wish to retain custody of the prisoner for other crimes?"

"No, Your Honor, we do not." The head of the French delegation was shaking her head.

"Guards, release Lord Black and Mister Lupin." Judge Goethe brought his gavel down three times. "This hearing is adjourned."

A look of pure relief washed over Sirius and his smile was a bit more genuine now. It didn't matter that British aurors were within a few paces of him... they couldn't touch him now if they wanted to! Sirius stood and looked over to his smiling supporters.

It took several minutes for the courtroom to clear enough for Sirius to meet with the Granger-Delacour party. In that time, Remus made his entrance through a side door and managed to come up to Hermione at about the same time as Sirius did.

"Hey! Hermione! Where's Harry?" Sirius's voice swept over the crowd.

Before answering, Hermione closed in for a quick hug. She didn't notice the camera flashes coming from a handful of journalists staking out the exit doors. Her parents saw them though... Alain too.

"I can't say right now. Too many people can hear."

Hermione looked around at the thinning crowds and spotted Albus Dumbledore's grandfatherly smile. His presence took the edge off of her own smile but she wasn't going to complain too much as he could have made things much more difficult for her today. Luckily, there were still a few more joyful reunions to deal with.

"Professor Lupin!" Hermione gave the werewolf a hug to match the one she gave Sirius. Much to the annoyance of some, cameras continued to flash from the exit doors. "I'm ever so glad to see the two of you free again."

"Call me Remus, Miss Granger. I'm not your professor any longer." Remus greedily soaked up the warm hug... something the outcast werewolf almost never got from anyone anymore.

"Only if you call me Hermione, Remus."

"Time's up Mooney! Harry wants me to protect his fair maiden and that means you have to let go now."

Thoroughly embarrassed, Hermione pulled away from Remus as quickly as was polite.

"Really, Padfoot. It was just a hug. And I believe you were the one picking up newspapers and magazines on our way here in which a certain young Veela featured prominently?" Remus tried to reassure Hermione as much as he tried to deflect an old dog.

"Only one of us has been either imprisoned or drunk off their ass near constantly since Nineteen eighty-one. I think I'm entitled to- oh, by Merlin, she's gorgeous."

The recently released Lord Black let his eyes wander to a patch of silver-blond off to the side with disastrous consequences. His gaze locked onto the Delacours right before he spoke that last bit.

"Once again, I am hearing things I do not care to hear, Lord Black." As was the case yesterday, Alain Delacour was present to hear Sirius Black express far too much interest in his family.

"What I meant to say is that photographs simply do not do your daughter justice, Sir."

"You are looking at my wife, Lord Black."

"...oh, bugger... Would it help if I took a magically binding vow never to make advances on the ladies of your family... Monsieur Delacour?"

Apolline took pity on Sirius. As embarrassing as it was, these kinds of things happened all of the time wherever the Delacour family traveled.

"I assure you, Lord Black, that you are not in any great trouble. With my ancestry, one cannot avoid such comments and you are still more polite to us than most English purebloods, whether they have been to Azkaban or not."

"Never the less, I would still like to hear that vow." Alain didn't get such offers very often.

"I'd like one of those vows too."

"Daaaaaaaad!" Sirius looked between a scarlet faced Hermione and the man who had come up behind her.

"Mister Black may have embarrassed himself over Apolline, but he actually touched you."

Emma put a hand on Daniel's shoulder to stop him from puffing up his chest any more than he already had. Daniel may not have been seeing clearly due to fatherly concern, but she saw her daughter's warm-not-pervy hugs for what they were.

Sirius chuckled a little before hopefully putting this conversation to bed. "I'd be more than willing to swear magically binding oaths of honorable intentions to all of your women... if only I could make my way to a wandmaker's shop first. I seem to have misplaced my own wand a very long time ago."

"And for my part in that, Sirius, I am deeply sorry." Someone else had come up behind the celebrating group.

"Well if it isn't the Supreme Mugwump hisself! Nice of you to use all that power and influence to help me out of a tight spot instead of relying on a pair of talented yet frightfully young schoolchildren to brave the perils of a cloud of dementors to- oh, wait! That's exactly what you did! Silly me." Sirius may not care much about social niceties but he could drive a point home like nobodies business. "Obviously having two young teens do all the work for you was the logical path."

Albus's face was full of regret. Whether it was real or imagined was something none of Harry Potter's current extended family were willing to bet on.

"Never the less, I am sorry. I have much to atone for and a difficult path ahead if I am ever to right the wrongs of the last twenty years." Albus turned from Sirius to Hermione. "And my first task is to have a very serious discussion with the young Gryffindor before me."

"Ex-Gryffindor, Sir. I've been accepted to Beauxbatons Academie."

"Alas, I did not approve of your transfer, Miss Granger."

As influential as Albus Dumbledore was, he may have ignored the numerical advantage Hermione's current supporters enjoyed today.

"As her father and legal guardian, I gave her my consent to transfer. Emma did as well."

"Did Olympe not tell you, Sir?" Alain wasn't smiling, but his voice betrayed his confidence, "Our Department of Magical Education has accepted Hermione's transfer papers. As France does not recognize separate magical guardianships for it's first generation magicals, your permission was not necessary."

Anger. For the first time today, Hermione was sure she new exactly which emotion her ex-Headmaster was showing and showing honestly. Would he regret not throwing her under the bus on the witness stand earlier? Is he afraid that if Fudge's administration got Hermione into a holding cell then she might have a little 'accident' with a dementor? Hermione was more than a little afraid of that one herself.

"Surely you can see that this is a discussion that needs to be held behind closed doors with as few witnesses as possible?" Albus took quick look around. Young Gabrielle was wrapped tightly around her mother's waist but Harry Potter was nowhere in sight. "Preferably with Mister Potter in attendance."

"Harry will hear of it soon enough, Sir. I'm also quite sure that I would insist that everyone here be invited to any closed door meeting you wish to invite me to."

"Have I fallen so far in your opinion as to warrant such precautions, Miss Granger?" It didn't take a mind reader to see that he had. "Very well. I shall keep my explanation short today in the hopes that you will seek a meeting with me at a later date... preferably in the next week. First, please tell Harry that I am ready to answer a question that he asked me in the hospital wing after he woke up from his ordeal with Professor Quirrell and Voldemort. And..."

Albus paused for a moment to pull a non-magical composition book with slightly worn edges out from between the folds in his robes.

"...I also have something for Mister Potter and Miss Granger to look over. This is but one volume of a larger collection which encompasses Lily Potter's private journals. The last volume is a research journal with some rather excellent work for someone so young. I still find myself looking through that one trying to prove or disprove some of her theories on occasion."

Hermione's eyes really did light up at that. Albus was offering something of great personal value to Harry. She brought her hand forward to accept the gift.

Only to have Alain catch her by the wrist.

"Hermione, dear... I'm going to have to teach you a series of spells that Fleur learned some years ago when she first began to draw the attention of young boys. They are mostly detection and warding spells designed to make sure you do not just disappear one day never to be heard from again."

Albus was disappointed to find that Alain trusted him so little. Did Hermione's first lesson in magical survival have to center on his good-faith gift? Luckily for his self image, he did not see Minerva

McGonagall also casting similar detection charms from a few paces further away.

When Hermione finally did get her hands on the worn composition book, she held it with more reverence than she would were she holding the Gutenberg Bible. Right in the center of the front cover, in tight and proper letters that looked quite similar to Hermione's own personal best, were the words:

Lily Evans January 30th, 1971

Hermione didn't see anything beyond the journal for a few minutes as those around her spoke guardedly with her ex-Headmaster. During this time, Albus noted one detail that he would have to analyze at a later date.

Gabrielle was twisting around her mother's waist to get a better look at the composition book in Hermione's hands. It appeared as though she were as interested in Lily's journal as Hermione was.

-o\O/o-

"Harry! There you are!"

Harry looked up to see Hermione walk into Gabrielle's bedroom. He was in the same position comforting a shaking Gabrielle in much the same manner as the night before.

"Sorry I couldn't go get you like before, 'Mione. It's different now than it was."

Harry looked out of the bedroom windows prompting Hermione do do the same.

"Harry? Why is Gabby's dreamscape on fire?"

"I don't know." Harry ran his hand along the eight year old's spine in a bid to calm her down, but these last two nights have been different from before. "I'm not sure it's all from her fight with the aurors or whoever they were either."

Harry looked back at the fifteen year old witch.

"You found us tonight. Congratulations on that."

"You've come into my dreams so often that I began to feel out when you were coming. Then I got a feel for how... not that I could describe the process." Hermione made her way back to the side of Gabrielle's bed and hopped on. "Last night was lonely enough without the two of you that I couldn't take one more night like it. My dreams aren't worth anything if you're not in them."

Both Harry and Hermione seemed to wordlessly agree that being in Gabby's dreamscape while it was on fire was not a good time to get overly affectionate. Finally, their conversation was restarted. "Tell me more about the fire."

"As you wish."

Harry briefly smiled at Hermione, just long enough to see her blush. Looks like she saw that movie too.

"The other night, I figured that the fire must have been part of her nightmares... there were flaming men on the lawn last night and everything. Tonight, there are no flaming men. Nothing that reminds me of that attack in the witness room at all. Since she fell asleep tonight, all I see is the blue-white fire getting closer to the bedroom. The closest flames were at least fifty meters further out last night and I can't just will them away at all. The monsters are gone, but Little Angel won't leave this room or my lap for anything. She won't even come out from under the covers."

Hermione slipped her hand under the covers to run her fingers through Gabrielle's hair.

"She's warm. Why didn't you say that?"

"I've tried to pull the covers off, but she insists. It's getting quite toasty down there, let me tell you."

"Gabrielle? Gabby?"

Hermione waited for the little Veela to respond but received only silence for her efforts. She slowly drew her fingernails lightly across Gabby's back in a way she remembered her own mother doing years ago when Hermione was just a quivering ball in her Mum's lap.

"Harry? Have you been having a pillow fight?"

"What? No. Of course not. It's been at least a week since we had one of those." Harry looked up to Hermione's face from the little space heater in his lap. "Why?"

Hermione held up her hand, palm up.

"I think her pillow's been torn open... maybe the mattress."

Here and there along Hermione's fingers were little tufts of downy white feathers.

"Well, I'll just fix her bedding right up... as soon as she let's me get out from under her."

There was a light grunt from under the covers.

"That's a 'no' then, is it, Gabby?"

Another grunt.

"Looks like I'm not going anywhere tonight then."

"Right."

"So."

"So?"

"Pretty please, tell me about my Mum? You've been reading that journal, right?"

Hermione moved a little closer to Harry so she could run her fingers along his back.

"Oh, I like your Mum, Harry. At eleven, she was just like me!"

Harry smiled. "Really?"

"Welllllll. She may have been a bit more social than I was... had a friend in the girl's dorm right off... but she was definitely the bookwormy know-it-all of Gryffindor for her year!"

"Brilliant! Surely Mum would have approved of you then, right?"

Hermione didn't say anything, but her eyes were getting suspiciously bright.

"Right?"

"You... you really think so?"

"Mum would have adored you. I'm sure of it. I'd bet my life on it if I still had one."

Hermione's head dropped onto Harry's shoulder.

"What about Dumbledore, then? He said you had a question and he's finally willing to answer it."

Harry creased his brow in thought. "I find it odd that he wants to answer that question now."

"Which question was it?"

"I asked him why Voldemort wanted me dead. Remember, the bastard went through my Mum to get to me that night, it wasn't the other way around."

"Oh... oh, right! That is an important question. But how can we trust him now? Whatever his answer, it most likely involves the two of us returning to Hogwarts."

"Not bloody well happening."

"Language."

"Yes, 'Mione."

"Well?"

"I'm dead. As far as I'm concerned, the answer to that question is meaningless now."

"And your Mum's journals?"

"That's assuming he even plans to hand over more than he already has. No. Mum's journal is his carrot. Right now I'm weary of what he'll use for a stick."

For the next several hours, the teenaged witch spent her time either silently watching the hypnotic beauty of Gabby's dream-fire or quietly telling Harry about little snippets of his mother's first year at Hogwarts.

-o\O/o-

Hermione walked into the front parlor of the Delacour family maison-forte. After Bern, Alain felt sufficiently threatened to tighten up the family defenses again.

"Mum?" Emma, Daniel, Apolline and Alain were all sitting around a coffee table and watched as Hermione came into the room.

"Good morning, dear." Emma replied, a steaming cup of coffee in her hand.

"Morning, Mum. Dad. Aunty Apolline. Uncle Alain. What... what can I do for you this morning?"

"When we were walking through Bern on our first day there, your father and I had pretty much decided to go back to England and get back to work at the practice." Emma saw Hermione's eyes open wider and her chest draw in enough air to deliver an hour long retort. "BUT... but, when we learned what had happened to you and the girls in the I.C.W. chambers... well, plans can change."

Hermione visibly relaxed, but her heart was still hammering from the quick adrenaline burst she got at her mother's announcement.

"Now, if we combine all of the things we have read in the Prophet with the fact that unidentified mercenaries and English magical police officers attacked you in the heart of the magical U.N. building... well."

Hermione's father picked up where her mother let off.

"Add to that a headmaster that clearly doesn't care about our opinion when it comes to your schooling, one who won't hesitate to use magic on our property without asking for permission and the answer is clear. We can't go back. Not to our house and not to our practice."

"Your parents are right to be worried, Hermione." Apolline spoke up. "With only a simple charm, your parents could be signing papers giving Albus Dumbledore full guardianship over you. Under British Magical law, he could even write up a betrothal agreement in your name... a magically enforced betrothal not unlike the contract that forced Harry to participate in the Triwizard even though he never entered."

Hermione's reaction to that was clear for all to see. Magically enforced arranged marriages that could entrap Hermione herself were far worse than house elf slavery ever was. They hit much closer to home.

She almost threw up at the idea.

"Please please please Mum, don't go back!"

Emma got up and helped to steady her faltering daughter.

"We won't be going back, dear. I don't know how hard it's going to be opening a practice near Beauxbatons or in Marseille, but I'm not letting you get away from us this time."

"I'm with your mother on this, Little Em." Hermione took a moment from being horrified at the thought of being magically forced to marry a boy she didn't like, much less love, to be embarrassed about her childhood nickname. "Next time you find yourself chasing time dragons or fighting giant acid spitting toads or crushing on deceased internationally famous teen superheroes, I want you to tell me about it face to face as soon as you wake up in the magical hospital or at the very latest during the victory feast honoring your battle or whatnot."

Hermione stared uncomprehendingly at her dad.

"Don't look at me like that. That's exactly what's going to happen! I can see the trend. Can't you see the trend?"

Hermione began to giggle. "Actually... -snicker- ...I can!"

Hermione almost bust her gut open during the resulting tension killing giggle-fit.

"Bloody Hell-"

"Language!" "Language!"

"So -snort- sorry. But I can see the trend! Oh, Harry! Even dead, trouble follows you like a lovesick puppy."

-o\O/o-

"...little angel..."

...

"Gabrielle. Are you coming down for lunch?"

She didn't want to.

"Mmmnnnnnn."

It was a start. That's more than Zoé got out of Little Angel when she was tasked with retrieving the girl for lunch.

"Little Angel," Fleur stepped into her sister's room and crossed the distance to a girl sized lump under the comforter on Gabby's bed. "Have you been in bed all morning? How do you expect to do well in your magic lesson this afternoon if you can't even get up for lunch?"

Gabby wasn't listening. She was hot and her head hurt and her back was itchy and her tummy just didn't want anything in it right now. She felt a weight settle nearby and the covers began to shift.

"Come Little Angel, how can you possibly stay in bed any-"

Gabby heard her sister stop talking as soon as a cool, soothing hand met her bare neck.

"Gabby! You're burning up! How long have you felt like this?"

Gabby didn't answer. She burrowed deeper under her covers looking for just the right spot.

Her bed shifted again as her sister's weight left the bed. She may have heard footsteps leading away, but she wasn't really paying attention.

Gabby repeated her performance with only minor variations when Fleur brought Momma in with her a few minutes later.

-o\O/o-

"Welcome back, Misses McGonagall."

"A pleasure to be back, dear." The Scottish transfiguration mistress banished the last of the soot off of her robes and gave Hermione a quick hug. "Where's the wee one? Have I lost her interest so quickly?"

"Oh, no. She's taken ill."

Minerva was about to reply when the voices and footsteps of two women could be heard approaching from the hallway..

Apolline entered the foyer to meet Minerva but she wasn't alone. Another woman... another Veela followed her out of the hallway and up to Hermione and Minerva..

As introductions were made, Hermione had to hide her jealousy over the unfairness of genetics and magical inheritance. Madame Régine Mitterrand. Gabby's grand-mère. The beautiful woman in front of her was Gabby and Fleur's grandmother. Her hair was as lustrous as Apolline's and her skin equally flawless. She moved with grace, energy and power. Did Veela never fall prey to old age? The woman had to be in her mid fifties and yet could pass for Apolline's older sister. Her early thirty-something year old sister. Hermione suddenly found herself wondering why there aren't more Veela in the world if even the old ones look this good.

"Madame Mitterrand. Auntie Apolline. How is Gabby?" Asked Hermione.

One minor mark against Apolline's mother was that she did not speak English. It was a very minor mark considering that aside from French, the woman did speak Italian, German and Greek. Régine apparently was very active amongst European Veela communities and needed to speak the languages spoken by most of her fellow grand matrons.

Unfortunately, Minerva was still learning French. She might catch some of the conversation, but would have to wait until later to hear from Hermione any of the interesting bits.

"Little Angel is being stubborn. She has the symptoms of Veela maturation, but this is not her tenth summer. Your daughter is a very early bloomer, Apolline."

"I beg your pardon, Madame... but... you make that sound bad. I've seen eight year old girls get their periods before even if it is early. Is this unexpected for a Veela child?" Hermione wanted to sound respectful yet at the same time curiosity was eating her alive. Could 'The Talk' actually be that different for Fleur and Gabby than it was for Hermione?

Régine's eyes bored into the teenaged witch.

"For your information, Miss Granger, all Veela become fertile in their tenth summers. Certain abilities and physical changes coincide with fertility in Veela just as they do in any human female. Have you seen anything unusual about Gabrielle, Miss Granger? Some change in the way she has been acting around you?" This was no mere pop quiz.

"Well... with the trouble in Bern only two days ago, I thought Gabby was just reacting naturally to how she attacked those men... but there are a couple of things." Hermione paused. What did she know about Veela puberty? She may know more about Veela than any student in Hogwarts, but this was different.

"Go on dear. Anything could help." Régine's voice was gentle and supportive.

"To begin with... Gabby won't let Harry back outside."

Régine looked at her daughter for an explanation.

"Harry Potter, Maman. Little Angel can carry his spirit inside of her body. They call it 'being inside'."

Régine looked back over to Hermione. "And she won't let him out?"

"She's needs him. He comforts her. Her dreams have been full of blue fire for the past two nights and she's quite scared of it."

"How do you- no. What color was the fire in Gabrielle's dreams?"

"Blue-white, just like the flames she creates during her wand magic lessons."

"Her fire isn't red or orange?" Régine's brow rose slightly upon hearing the color of Gabrielle's magical fire.

Apolline started. Hermione wondered if she had just realized that fact herself.

"I'm terribly sorry, Maman. I should have sent word before."

"Do not worry yourself over it. No one expects such a thing to happen."

"Pardon me, but what does that mean?" Hermione was getting flustered. Apolline and her mother were acting as though there were something seriously wrong with Little Angel.

"Along with the physical changes that we go through, young Veela dream of the fire they wield in anger. It will become a standard theme in her dreams for many years to come. I should have noticed. I thought it was due to her young age that Gabrielle cast in blue-white. When Fleur first learned, her flames were red as were mine when I was younger. Over time the flames will change from red to orange as a Veela get's more control of her abilities... but blue-white... it's ..."

"It's only to be found in myth."

Hermione could not decide if Régine was trying to convince Apolline of her way of thinking or if she was now uncomfortable discussing Veela heritage in front of non-Veela.

"But, Maman-"

"Hush, child. It's too early to say one way or another. Apolline, see to your daughter. I have friends to call on. When I return, I'd very much like to speak to this Potter boy that means so much to Gabrielle."

"Yes, Maman."

"I may not be alone when I return."

"Yes, Maman."

Hermione watched as Madame Mitterrand made her excuses and floo'd back to her home, but the teen's mind was upstairs with Gabby and Harry. What would flame color matter to a Veela? Did color mean the same thing to magical fire as it did to normal fire? Did Gabby's very young age make a difference? Was it safe for Hermione to learn this much about Veela? Régine did not seem overly pleased that Hermione was asking questions.

Maybe she could ask Fleur for advice... and a little more background on Veela. Surely at least one of the Delacour family libraries had a tome or two written by Veela for Veela.

Someone cleared their throat.

"Oh, Misses McGonagall!"

"Whatever it was, it must have been something good for you to forget I was even here, dear." Minerva had to fight to keep her smirk hidden.

"I- I'm terribly sorry! Madame Mitterrand was discussing Gabby's illness with Apolline. She made it sound like something to do with Veela puberty... but then Gabby's grandmother went off to get a second opinion or two."

"Transfiguring little Veela into big ones is not a process I know anything about, Miss Granger. I do, however, know how to cast the Patronus charm. After seeing Mister Potter cast that one, I dare say you might want to give it a try."

"Oh, yes!"

Maybe Hermione could set aside the mystery of Veela biology for an hour or two.

"Mister Potter told you about his lessons with Professor Lupin, didn't he, child?"

Hermione nodded eagerly.

"So you know all about finding positive thoughts then, don't you?"

Hermione kept nodding.

"I seem to remember seeing a picture in the paper of a very special kiss, Miss Granger. Perhaps you might want to try with that one?"

Hermione blushed hard. If positive emotions were the key to a Patronus charm, then that kiss would do very well. That kiss... or the savage snogging that followed in her dreams that night. Maybe both.

Two hours later, dinner was served. Hermione was kept from asking Fleur discrete questions about the Veela life cycle by the timely and energetic interruption of one Segolene Royal. Segolene could not stay away any longer knowing that her second family was hurting from magical ambush and an unexpected illness.

Segolene almost paid more attention to Gabrielle's quiet, bedridden form than her very dearest friend Fleur. With all of the other recent events to deal with, no one found time to tease Hermione about a certain Hogwarts uniform or how it could be altered to best effect.

-o\O/o-

A door opened in the soft light of Gabrielle's bedroom. Interior lights had been extinguished as unnecessary; the fires were close enough and big enough to provide plenty of light to Harry and his little space heater.

"My poor, poor Little Angel. Are you really growing up early as your mother fears?"

Gentle footfalls came up behind Gabby's protector.

"How's Little Angel tonight, Harry?"

"She's toastier. She shivers more. She must be tearing into a pillow down there what with all of the down that I keep pulling out after stroking her back and scalp. She hasn't talked to me all day."

"Not even here?"

Hermione tried to lift up a corner of the comforter to take a peek at Gabby only to stop when a delicate hand pushed her away.

"Gabby, luv. Speak to me, please?"

Hermione bent herself low. Hopefully her mouth was somewhere around Gabby's ear beneath the covers.

"Please, honey. I only want to help."

There was a pitiful little moan, but little else.

"You didn't have dreams like this when you... er... got bigger, did you? 'Mione?"

"..." Hermione's glare was answer enough.

"Right. Shutting up now."

Righteous anger fell away at Harry's quick surrender.

"I'm not a Veela, in case you didn't notice..."

"Could have fooled me." Point to Potter.

Hermione smiled and started again. "As I was saying, I'm no Veela, but I don't remember any particular dreams coinciding with that point of my life. I can also say that I've never heard of anyone relating certain dreams to it."

"Fair enough. Did you get anymore out of Fleur?"

Hermione blushed bright red at that.

"Depends..."

"Depends on what, 'Mione? You did a fair job of giving us an update before following Fleur and Segolene back to Fleur's room. I know it was starting to get late then, but they don't strike me as the type to make an early night of it after being apart for so long."

"Well... they weren't asleep yet, but I didn't learn anything that we can use to help Gabrielle."

"Well, what did you learn then?"

Hermione's blush turned several shades darker.

"I learned," Hermione nearly whispered as not to disturb the little girl who's dream she was intruding upon, "that Fleur and Segolene are much closer than we thought they were."

"What do you mean? I already know they're best mates."

Poor, clueless Harry.

Hermione did whisper the next bit. "I mean that they were being intimate with each other."

No reaction.

"Physically intimate... there was naked touching, Harry."

Hermione felt like her face would catch fire any moment now. Harry's eyes bugged out and his jaw fell open. Harry slowly turned his head to the door.

"Harry James Potter! You will not sneak into Fleur's room to perv on them! Is. That. Clear?"

"Crystal. Have I mentioned lately what a wonderful, incredible and beautiful young woman you are Hermione? Really. I love you to bits."

How did she figure out how to yell while whispering? That's his 'Mione, brilliant but scary.

End Chapter

Chapter Nine: Angel

"Good morning, Hermione."

"Good morning, Fleur... Segolene."

Hermione sat down at the breakfast table and picked up a newspaper.

"You have a letter, Hermione. Looks like it was written by a boy to me." Hermione looked up from an article on local tourism to see Segolene sporting a little grin. "If I am not mistaken, the seal is Bulgarian."

"Really?" Hermione looked across the table to see a letter sitting where Alain always puts post after he's screened it for tricks and traps.

There was one letter sitting alone in the middle of the table with a bright red wax seal affixed. In the middle of the red wax was a magically colored image of two lions on either side of a shield with a third lion on it. Under the coat of arms was a wand crossing a broom. Segolene was right; that was a Bulgarian Ministry of Magic seal.

Before the two older teens could start teasing Hermione about a certain Triwizard Champion, the youngest member of their household shuffled into the room and dropped into her chair.

"Good morning, Gabrielle." Fleur greeted her little sister. "It's good to see you get out of bed on your own today. Are you feeling better?"

"Don't look at me." Gabby's reply was short and distinctly uncute.

Hermione immediately looked at Gabby, Bulgarian post forgotten for the moment. This was a day to remember for all time. Gabrielle wasn't the least bit cute. In fact, the eight year old looked like someone had given her food poisoning and kicked her puppy.

Hermione instinctively put a hand over her gaping mouth. After a moment of pure shock, Hermione pulled her eyes away from Gabby's evil twin just long enough to check Fleur's and Segolene's reactions. The white-blond elder sister was looking on with pity.

She must have been there before. Curly brunette streamers shook as Segolene tried desperately to hide her amusement.

"Oh, Fleur, I..." Segolene almost lost her control and had to start again. "Oh, Fleur... I remember when the same thing happened to you!"

Hermione looked back at Little Angel, as Segolene continued. "Why, you were a complete stranger for a week or so until I got my best friend back again. You know... until I saw you get sick and lose your Princessiness for a week, I wasn't really sure that you were human at all."

That comment brought Hermione around. Honestly, she was grateful for an excuse to focus on something other than anti-Gabby.

"What do you mean? Why would seeing Fleur fall ill make you think that Fleur wasn't human before?"

As Segolene composed herself, Fleur moved around to her sister's side and began the thankless task of getting a sick eight year old to pick out a food she might both eat and not heave onto the floor ten minutes later.

"You see, Hermione... Fleur and I have known each other since we were three. Fleur and her parents were there for there for me and my mother when Father was killed. I'm not exaggerating when I say that I loved Fleur as dearly as a sister by my seventh birthday and I've loved Gabrielle just as much since she was born..."

This much of the story Hermione had heard before in bits and pieces; but this time, all of it was only background for a new fact – a detail that seemed important for whatever it was that's been happening to Gabrielle.

"Now as much as I loved her and her family, I still didn't believe that Veela were human back then. Don't get me wrong, I didn't hate Fleur's family or anything- but they were like walking talking unicorns to me."

Segolene stopped to take a croissant off of the platter before her and cut it open.

"As I was a little girl, I thought of Veela as pretty magical creatures right out of any muggle Fairy Tale. And my friend Fleur, my friend Fleur was like a magical forest animal princess. You see, I had already been told that when she got bigger, Fleur would be able to change into a birdlike creature and use fire... I even took to calling her 'Bird Princess' in my diary."

"Father claims he called me his Princess first, but Segolene here truly spread it around." So Fleur was listening along.

Hermione heard the warmth in Fleur's interruption; the emotion present brought an image to the front of Hermione's mind of two young women so wrapped up in each other that neither one acknowledged the English witch stumble into their bedchamber and then leave in a panicked rush. She felt like she knew secrets... things she wasn't meant to know. For her new extended family, Hermione would gladly keep these secrets.

"As I was saying, it wasn't until just after Fleur's ninth birthday... her tenth summer as Veela keep track of time... that I ever saw her fall ill."

"Fall ill... like Gabby?" Hermione remembered Régine saying that all Veela become fertile in their tenth summers. That would make Fleur normal for a Veela, right?

"Yes, just like Gabby now. You must understand that I had never seen Fleur or any of her Veela family members fall ill before. Veela don't catch other illnesses like the flue or dragon pox. As a little girl, I was ill several times a year, just like nearly every girl or boy I knew... that made Veela different enough to my little mind that Fleur couldn't be human. She was a perfect magical Princess and far too good to be sick like me. You see? She couldn't be human."

"But then you saw her go through this..." Hermione tried her hand at calling out the next line in Segolene's story.

Hermione looked over to Fleur and Gabby. Was Fleur actually playing airplane with a spoon full of broth? Gabby's eyebrows were scrunched together and she was fighting Big Sissy Flower with a tightly closed mouth and defiant moans.

"And then I saw her go through this. Exactly. No longer was Fleur Delacour the most perfect princess ever to prance through enchanted forests and flutter about the Fey courts. For the first time, I saw a sick little girl who was grumpy and in pain and who would paint the floor with her sick before the house elves could catch it all." Segolene sighed. "Of all the girls who had been part of our circle of friends before Fleur changed... I am the only one that remains faithful to this day."

Hermione began sifting through all that she just learned.

"And this happened a full year later for Fleur?"

"Gabby is the early one. I think one or two other girls in our classes were also starting to fill out when Fleur started, but I'm quite sure this puts Gabby ahead of the curve for hers. As bad as that will be for her, the real problem is her thrall. It will be years before she gets any reasonable level of control over it. Every boy in her school will soon become stupid at random frequent intervals. The other girls are going to get horribly jealous of her very soon."

"Poor, poor Little Angel. She's such a sweet girl. Losing all of her friends is going to be a personal hell for her without someone to carry her through it all."

"She does have a friend who can and will carry her through. Harry."

"Ah, but he is a boy and he is a ghost. She needs girls her age that will continue to grow with her... girls like-" Segolene's face shifted into a wide grin. "Like Gigi."

"And Aimee? Can we get those two to come for a visit? Even if their parents know Gabby is ill?"

Hermione saw the potential. Gigi and Aimee may not be as close to Gabby as Segolene was to Fleur, but if they could learn to see Gabby the same way Segolene sees Fleur then Gabby would get two very good friends indeed. Through most of primary school, Hermione would have given her right leg for a good friend. She was alone and seemingly doomed to stay that way until the threat of losing her right leg to a troll worked well enough to give her a friend in Harry Potter.

"I'll talk to Apolline about it." Segolene murmured. "In the mean time... what news from Bulgaria?"

Both witches looked down to the wax sealed letter resting by Hermione's hand.

Soon enough, Hermione had the wax seal broken and the letter unfolded before her. As she began to read, Segolene slipped around the table and began to read over her shoulder.

"Well? What does Vic have to say?"

Fleur asked this as she came back into the room from dealing with her sickly sister. The airplane game didn't work. Fleur had to threaten her sister with calling for their mother before Gabby would consent to sipping some broth through a straw... in front of a television... under a blanket Zoé had to fetch from their home in Paris.

"He's recovering well. Vic has been up and walking on his own for a week now. The healers expect him to be able to fly again by December."

"Do they say when they will let him rejoin his team?" Fleur may not be a true fan of the sport, but she did want Victor to be happy doing what he was born to do.

"No... but Vic is inviting the three of us to spend time in his home town. Apparently he fears that he will forget all the English he learned since the beginning of the year unless he can find someone worth talking to." Hermione set down the letter. Fleur immediately picked up the discarded letter and read it herself.

"Hmmm... Vic is being a good boy." Fleur began to parse the letter looking for hidden meaning. "His words are warm and positive... he does not make demands nor is there anything really amorous. He invites all three of us, not just Hermione."

Segolene interrupted. "He wishes to maintain his English? He does not mention learning French?"

Hermione blushed when both French witches immediately turned to her.

"I love Harry."

"Of course you do, 'ermione. We all know zis. I'm sure even Victor knows too. What 'e does not know is zat it is not safe for you to travel. Perhaps we could ask 'im to come protect zree fair damsels from ze dark wizards, no?"

"Just think. Ced and Vic won't know what hit them when they see our Miss Granger in Beauxbatons blue!" Segolene gasped. "I almost forgot! Where's your old uniform, Hermione? I know what we're doing today!"

-o\O/o-

Zoé popped into the room.

"Madame. Your husband has come home with a guest."

"Thank you, Zoé. Please see how Dobby is doing in the kitchen."

"As you wish, Madame."

As the house elf popped away, Apolline set down the scroll she had been reading and looked at the three young witches who were making use of the family library.

"Girls? Please see to it that Mister Diggory is introduced to our other guests. Dinner should begin in half an hour."

One 'yes, mother' and two 'yes, auntie's later, Fleur, Segolene and Hermione left the room. As they were leaving, Apolline listened in as the girls planned out their evening.

"You two go boil Ced's blood. I'll just make sure your parents and Sirius don't die when they see you. Forewarned is forearmed!" Segolene turned opposite the other two after crossing the threshold.

"You do that! Fleur? Perhaps you should grab the leash now."

"Thank you. Is the collar too tight?"

"No tighter than your choker." As the girls continued to walk away from Apolline, the tak-tak-tak of Fleur's stiletto heels almost masked their voices. "You're, um... you're sure we shouldn't change again before dinner? Our parents are going to be at the table."

"Please... Mother won't bat an eyelash. Not only is she Veela, but she is a patron of the performing arts. If anything, she will critique our work and say if we have any promise for stage or screen. Father will use our fun to test Cedric."

"Dad's going to have a heart attack." Apolline could hear the nervous tension in Hermione's voice.

"Good thing he's in a house full of witches then. We'll fix him up, good as new." There was a short pause. "Let's get into character. We want Harry to truly appreciate his birthday present, don't we?"

"As you wish, my Dark Mistress."

Apolline was slightly unnerved by Fleur's imperious laughter. Good. It had been too long since Fleur really lost herself in a role. Now that her older girls were off to entertain, Apolline set down the centuries old parchment scroll she had been looking over. There was still more than a week to the next full moon, and if Gabby were traveling down the path she looked to be traveling, many questions would be answered on that evening. Surely her Maman would know what was happening and how best to react.

Apolline went to fetch her youngest and the birthday boy.

Gabrielle was, true to her recent behavior, lounging in the one room of their oldest and most enchanted family home which was completely modern. Cartoons needed watching and soda needed slurping. Sick little girls deserved a little spoiling, didn't they?

Imagine her surprise, when, for the first time in days, Apolline found Harry next to Gabby instead of inside of her.

"Harry? How are you this evening?"

Harry turned around. He wouldn't miss anything important as he'd seen this episode of Rugrats with Gabby at least a dozen times already since the beginning of summer.

"I'm well, Auntie. Our Little Angel seems to be in a sugar coma of sorts, but she's been much better today. I might actually get to spend a few hours with the rest of you." The ghost in front of Apolline looked thoughtful for a moment. "I should apologize to the others for ignoring them for so long... everyone's getting ready for dinner, right?"

"My dear Harry. You do so much for Gabrielle... and on your birthday no less... you have nothing to apologize for."

Harry looked down into the glazed eyes of little Gabby. Her mouth was hanging open, her cheeks and forehead were warm red and a nose goblin was attempting to escape its prison.

On the plus side, she had regained some of her adorable cuteness even in ill health. Fleur and Virginie even got Little Angel into a bath earlier today much to the eight year old's annoyance. In truth, cute-zombie Gabby was much preferable to the grumpy-demon Gabby of the past several days.

Apolline considered the improvements. Maybe this week she would invite Gabby's two friends over as Fleur had suggested. It would serve the girl right after what she did. The nerve of that little monster telling her own mother that she had a big butt. Apolline still hadn't gotten over it.

"Er, Auntie?" Harry looked a bit uncertain.

"Yes, Harry?"

"This illness... It won't hurt Gabby's birthday celebration, will it?"

Apolline smiled. How he doted on her Little Angel. Boy-Who-Lived or not, she would have loved to call this one son.

"Oh, no. Her birthday is on the eighteenth. Of course... if Gabby's illness is what we think it is, then it will overshadow her birthday a good bit."

"If you don't mind my asking, what do you think is happening? If... if that is... if non-Veela are allowed to know." Harry hoped he hadn't

stepped out of bounds, especially on such a non-boy topic, but this was Gabby that things were happening to.

Apolline considered her options for a moment. Dinner was drawing near, but she still had a few minutes.

"You must understand, Harry, that we trust you... and Hermione as well... and we are willing to tell you things that are not to leave the family. You deserve to know certain things because you are close to us, but these are things we do not wish to become public knowledge. Secrets, Harry."

"Mione and I are quite good at keeping secrets. I swear that whatever it is you say will not leave this house."

Apolline knew this would be his answer, of course, and she accepted his answer without hesitation.

"Well. I suspect you've heard from Hermione what I and my mother said to her, yes?" Harry nodded.

"Gabby is showing signs of becoming mature. It may happen on the full moon before her birthday... the full moon on the tenth."

Apolline sat down next to her daughter and began to run her fingers through the girl's hair.

"If she does mature as this illness of hers is indicating – a full year early I might add – then she will release her thrall for the first time, change her physical form for the first time, and cast true Veela fire for the first time... all under the effects of the full moon. Now don't mistake this for some were-beast transformation, Harry; the full moon nearest her birthday is a trigger that will only occur once in any Veela's life."

"You said the timing was off. Didn't you tell Mione that Gabby's flames were the wrong color too?"

Apolline nodded. "I did. How much do you know about color temperature? The science of heat?"

Harry shrugged his shoulders and shook his head. "I didn't get that far in my muggle education and Hogwarts doesn't cover anything like that. I bet Hermione knows."

"I'm sure she does." Apolline smiled. "Back to your question... there are things about Gabby's maturation, if that's what it is, that don't make any sense. First, she's a whole year early. We expected this to happen in August, but it was supposed to be next August."

"But why does that matter?"

Apolline looked over to Gabrielle. She still appeared insensate. That would have to change soon.

"We are Veela, Harry. We are humans... but we have a magical avian side that can reveal itself at times. Our life cycles do not have the same variations that you see in other human races. While we can be intimate with our lovers at any time, Veela are only truly at risk of conceiving in the fall."

Apolline stopped at Harry's confused stare. It couldn't be... could it?

"Concieving. Becoming pregnant. We always give birth the following summer."

Harry didn't let being dead stop him from blushing heavily. Apolline was wondering, not for the first time, how badly the adults in Harry's life had failed him.

"Ten summers later, when the young Veela are within a month of their birthday, they mature. This isn't to say that they grow all of their curves overnight, but they do start to grow out rather than just up. Are you with me so far, Harry?"

The young ghost nodded.

"So now that we have established that Gabby is early, we must consider her other change."

"Fire."

"Exactly. And this is the part I expect Hermione may already understand... or at least be suspicious of." Apolline was conscious

of her time limit. Dinner was fast approaching. It would be best to give him the short version. "You see, in nature... it's mostly seen in non-magical nature but also in magical nature as well... you can get an idea of the energies released in fire if you look at the color of its light.

"Think of red as being at the low end of this spectrum. A lit candle is red. Above that is orange. Think of a household incandescent lightbulb. That lightbulb is roughly half again as hot as a candle going by the light it emits. More powerful lights like what you find in a factory or a parking lot or a stadium use more energy to light up those larger spaces; they are much hotter than that single candle and give off yellow, white or even blue light. Think of yellow as twice as hot, white as three or four times as hot and blue as five or more times as hot as red.

"If heat is a form of energy, which it is... and if that energy is present in Veela fire, which it is, then one could infer that Gabrielle's blue-white fire is four to five times more powerful than we expect it to be a year earlier than we expect to see it."

Harry was silent.

"That's not even taking into account the volume of fire one can create. It's hard enough for the average young Veela to light a candle on purpose, much less turn half of an I.C.W. waiting room to ash in minutes."

Harry remained silent. He didn't know what to say...

"But enough of such things. Maman will sort it all out and Gabrielle will make us all very proud." Apolline shook off the serious mood and smirked at Harry. "You have chosen a good night to rejoin the household, Harry. Cedric Diggory is visiting and the girls have arranged a little surprise, both for your birthday and for his arrival."

"A surprise, Auntie?"

"Segolene got her hands on Hermione's Hogwarts uniform. Didn't Hermione tell you?"

"Why, no. No, she didn't."

"I think you will like the results, Harry. There is a reason Little Angel is dressed up tonight too."

Just as Harry's curiosity was peaking and his ghostly patience was wearing thin, Apolline completely ignored him in favor of bringing Gabrielle out of her stupor. That bitch.

-o\O/o-

Tak-Tak-Tak

Hermione first saw Cedric as she and Fleur rounded a corner to enter Alain's study. The two wizards were talking about something or other until Cedric saw the two witches join them. At that point, Cedric's mouth continued to move but nothing came out.

Alain went quiet soon after.

"They're staring, slave. If there is anything wrong with my dress, you will suffer for it. Look me over."

With her father and their guest frozen in place, Fleur dropped Hermione's leash and spun slowly in place.

Hermione pretended to observe her 'mistress' but it was hard to suppress her laughter at seeing Cedric's open shock. At the very least, she could keep up the act until Alain chooses to intervene.

Apparently it was easier to shrug off a Veela when she was wearing her school uniform or Triwizard robes than it was when she was wearing a colorful flower print cheongsam with short sleeves, cloth so tight it must have been painted on and a slit up one side which revealed an amazing amount of thigh. Fleur's hair was pulled into a bun with just enough hair escaping at just the right places that Hermione was reminded of birds in flight. Fleur was also fourteen centimeters taller than usual due a rather aggressive looking pair of heels.

"You are flawless as always, Mistress."

"Then it must be you. Turn."

Hermione obediently twirled in place. Her own hair was wild, but not bushy. Her shoes were a play on the traditional Mary Janes with shiny silver buckles and heels that were high but not stripper high. Everything in between was the hottest Hogwarts uniform Cedric had ever oggled. Her neck sported a shiny red collar with gold buttons and a matching red leash. Hermione's cloak was cut to stop just below the elbows and spread wide open in the front. She wore a dirty white blouse with the sleeves rolled up and half of the buttons undone. Her Gryffindor tie was loosely knotted just low enough to help highlight a bit of red and gold fabric held tight to her bosom. Below the partially un-tucked blouse was a pleated skirt torn ragged at mid thigh. The skirt displayed Gryffindor colors in a tartan hatch. Her knee high socks were artistically stained and torn. By contrast, Hermione's hair and skin were spotlessly clean.

"You're posture is abysmal! " Fleur barked.

Hermione snapped to attention, thrusting her shoulders back and chest out. She apologized.

"I am sorry, my Mistress. Shall I ask Mistress Royal to take her time with the cane tonight?"

"After Lord Black 'as 'ad 'is fill of you, of course."

"Of course, Mistress."

Alain finally snapped out of it.

"Are you quite done tormenting Mister Diggory, girls? He's gone quite pale, in case you haven't noticed."

"But Papa. 'e 'asn't fainted yet." Fleur pouted as best she could, but constant exposure to Little Angel built Alain's tolerances to levels that Little Princess never had to contend with.

"At the very least, remove the leash. It's had its intended effect on the poor boy and I refuse to allow you to parade around in front of the Grangers in such a fashion."

"Yes, Papa." Perhaps if she gave him this much, he would not require a change of attire?

"Did Nathalie put you up to this? She's had her eye on you since you were fourteen."

"Nathalie? You mean-" Hermione asked Fleur until the Veela nodded slightly and glanced towards the dining room.

"One of my distant cousins. Nathalie runs ze only all Veela 'ore'ouse in Western Europe. Only ze best girls and only ze best clients... so she says anyway. I made ze mistake of going to visit 'er at work one day and 'ad to turn down offers from two famous actors and Germany's Magical President. Zeir female Magical President. I was fifteen at ze time."

"Nathalie has also been hosting Lord Black recently. I daresay he will be more sedate for this meal than when we met in Bern. At the very least he should have developed something of a tolerance." Alain was hoping that Sirius would be able to behave himself for at least one night. Nathalie had the poor man wrapped around her little... something. She's been only too happy to sink her claws into the equivalent of a pop-superstar in the magical world.

"Uhhhh... umm... Fleur?" Cedric was rallying. Good for him.

"Welcome to our 'ome, Cedric."

Fleur walked up to the young wizard who still looked down at her in spite of her footwear. After a warm hug and two bussed cheeks from Fleur, Hermione gave him the same.

"It's ever so good to see you again Cedric. I hope you don't mind, but we just had to give you a show considering what those who work with your father think of us."

Cedric almost lost his smile but he recovered quickly. Hermione suspected that two scandalously dressed witches would trump political shenanigans any day.

"What they think doesn't mean anything to me, Hermione. I know you better than they do." Cedric gave Hermione a very visible once over. "If the boys in Gryffindor could see what I see now... you'd have to beat them off with a troll's club."

Cedric turned to Fleur and gave her a good looking over as well. Not too thorough. Alain was right beside him.

"And Fleur. I'm sure the boys of Beauxbatons will miss you now that you are free of the school? You look-" Ced paused and almost turned to Fleur's father, but caught himself at the last moment. "stunning tonight. I wanted to present gifts to the two of you and Segolene, but we're going to have to wait until your father has had a chance to check my luggage."

"I'm afraid it can't be helped, Mister Diggory. As I said earlier, the Delacour family has enemies who will try anything to get at us."

Considering that Cedric began this journey at the British Ministry of Magic, Alain thought it best to have some of his better aurors sift through Cedric's trunk. He didn't think himself good enough to catch anything an Unspeakable might come up with.

A clock began to strike the hour.

"Shall we take this to the dining room?" Everyone nodded at Alain's suggestion.

More introductions were made at the dinner table. Cedric's introduction to the Grangers was frequently interrupted by Daniel asking Hermione if she was cold or otherwise uncomfortable in any of a dozen different ways. Emma may have bitten her lip a couple of times but otherwise overlooked her daughter's costume. The Hufflepuff Champion was shocked beyond words to find his ex-Deputy Headmistress attending this dinner. Hermione soon began discussing lesson plans with the Scot. Much better. Cedric also met Sirius Black and his date for the evening. Long platinum-blond hair... impossibly deep blue eyes... a bit of a family resemblance. Nathalie. This could have been a tense moment if Nathalie hadn't been right next to Sirius keeping him distracted as only a Veela could. The Veela Madam may not have been sitting in his lap but her right hand rarely escaped from under the table. Same for Padfoot's left hand. Hermione suspected that Sirius still didn't know that anyone other than Nathalie was in the room.

"Cedric!" Harry, Apolline and Gabby just entered.

"Harry! You don't know how happy I am to see you again." Cedric tore his eyes away from the girls when he heard Harry.

"It's a pity Victor's still recovering. I'd love to see him again soon. He should have been here."

"Too right!"

Cedric turned completely away from three young witches dressed to impress and focused on the dead fourteen year old boy.

Segolene pouted. She had, after all, put a lot of work into her Beauxbatons uniform. The brunette's blouse and uniform jacket were both trimmed to give her a bare midriff. Her skirt was shorter than Hermione's and was being held aloft by several lace petticoats. Instead of socks, white silk stockings and garters spanned from Segolene's petticoats to a pair of platform sandals. All that work and the three of them were ignored for a dead boy. Was Cedric gay or something?

For a brief moment in time, Cedric seemed to forget that he was in polite company.

"Bloody Hell, Harry! What happened in the hospital wing? You disappeared and- and then Vic's heart just stops. He was dead, wasn't he?"

Now there's one way to silence a room.

"It's not my place to say, Ced. Vic and I had a little chat and it's up to him if anyone else ever learns what it was all about."

Hermione was about to ask what the hell they were talking about (more politely, of course) when a little voice called out.

"Momma, I don't feel good. Can I go now?"

Gabrielle was standing by her mother in an adorable blue dress with a white apron. Apparently Segolene couldn't resist turning Little Angel into a picture perfect Alice. Alain refused to play Mad Hatter tonight, though now that she thought of it, Sirius would have been a fine match for the part. Apolline also politely refused to be the White Queen.

Nathalie had to cover her open mouth. This she did not expect. Little Angel? This summer? Why didn't anyone tell her? For the first time this evening, Sirius seemed to come out of his Veela induced happy.

"Harry? That you, kid?"

"Yeah. Sorry, Padfoot, but it looks like I'll be with Gabby tonight."

Gabby leaned against her mother and looked at the floor.

"Harry? Come inside. Please?"

Harry apologized to everyone with a short wave and disappeared from view. A moment later, Gabrielle seemed to bob slightly and step away from her mother.

"Gabrielle?" Apolline continued to look at her dazed daughter.

"Gabby? Gabby, your mother wants you." Why would Gabby say that? Why would she start looking around for herself? "Littel Ange-"

Gabby's question fell short when her hand bumped into her mother's thigh. The little girl's eyes shot open and she looked at both of her hands frantically. Apolline was the first adult to react.

"Harry? Is that you?" Gabrielle immediately looked up to her mother.

"Auntie?"

"Harry!" As the little girl twisted to answer Hermione's call, something occurred to her.

He was breathing. He was standing on solid ground. He was really short. He was wearing panties.

In a move that didn't register to most of those in the room, Harry shifted his weight from one foot to the other. As Harry moved, cloth shifted over bear skin. What in Merlin's name...

"I'm a girl!"

Much to the shock of everyone watching. Gabrielle's slight form shuddered twice and dropped to the floor. Harry fainted.

Nathalie and Sirius agreed that watching his eight year old Veela godson scream 'I'm a girl' and faint was the funniest thing either of them had ever seen. Cedric would have laughed along with the Azkaban escapee and his date if not for the fact that three hot teen witches had just run over to an unconscious Alice. All three promptly bent over the insensate girl-ghost in an effort to give aid.

Cedric forgot to breathe. Hermione's knickers matched her bra. Segolene's knickers matched the pure white of her petticoats. Fleur apparently thought that visible lines would detract from her outfit and was making due without this evening.

A firm hand came down on Cedric's shoulder from somewhere behind him. The hand applied some pressure and turned him around.

"Umm, sorry. Soooooo... I hear you two are healers. What's that like without magic?"

As the young wizard tried not to die due to an overabundance of fathers in the room, he spied Sirius and Nathalie off to the side. The Veela had her hands over the English wizard's face but she had left a clear gap between two fingers. He could still perv. Lucky bastard... was she letting him look on purpose?

-o\O/o-

"Harry! Happy Birthday, Harry." Hermione gave the birthday boy a kiss.

"Mione. How did dinner turn out?"

Harry was in the same spot she's found him in every night since Bern. He was sitting on Gabby's bed in the middle of Gabby's room with a little Veela girl curled tight in Harry's lap under the covers. Blue-white flames licked against the window panes and singed wallpaper brown. Hermione ignored the seemingly dire situation of a burning building to continue her talk. She was unconcerned as they knew that the flames didn't follow traditional laws when spreading through this dreamworld. Slow and steady seems to be the key.

"After your little fainting spell, things settled down and we had a very nice social get together. Cedric was a bit stand offish for a bit after you fainted... still don't know what caused that... but otherwise he did very well."

"Why don't you try being dead for months only to accidentally take possession of a little boy's body. Trust me, you won't be prepared for the differences. But enough of that... what news of England?"

"It seems that the British Wizarding Press now considers me fully turned to the dark."

"Really? How did they come to that conclusion then?"

Harry ran a fingernail down the lump in front of him causing it to shake a little and let out a sweet little yelp. He knew the finger path well... it matched Gabby's spine.

"The Daily Prophet."

After a moment of concentration, Hermione pulled a copy of yesterday's Prophet out of the ether. Harry had been giving her lessons in how to shape Gabby's dreamscape. Any dreamscape really... she had better results in her own territory.

"It calls for the release of Auror Nymphadora Tonks. Understandable, I guess. Alain mentioned that they still couldn't prove she'd been a willing member of the assault team. Muggleborn Failure? Granger Falls to Darkness? What rubbish is this?" Harry scowled at the paper, causing it to burst into flames and fall to ash before Hermione could so much as flinch.

Hermione looked crossly at Harry for a moment but softened when she remembered why he was angry.

"They make it out like this is a common weakness, a flaw of all muggleborns. The Prophet's saying that any muggleborn is either at risk of going dark or secretly dark already."

"But that's just crazy. The only dark students at Hogwarts were all Malfoy's friends... purebloods, the lot of them." Harry couldn't see how anyone would believe this.

"It... it gets worse..." Hermione wasn't looking at Harry anymore. She dropped her gaze.

"What is it?" Harry tried to look Hermione in the eyes, but she refused to look back up.

"There was an editorial in the last copy Cedric read. Some pureblood Lord or other called for a registration of all muggleborns." Hermione's head snapped up. She was scared. Very, very scared. "They want to make all muggleborns wear a symbol of their heritage, Harry. Something anyone can see and identify as muggleborn."

Harry's eyes dropped to the cloak Hermione was wearing tonight. He could almost imagine a yellow six pointed star sewn above her heart.

It was the darkest, coldest thought Harry had in a very long time and he really didn't like it.

When he looked back up to Hermione's face, he could tell she had the exact same thought.

"Never." Harry put his hand over Hermione's on the bed. "I will never let that happen to you."

She didn't reply in words. Hermione simply moved closer to Harry until he could wrap his arms around her. Harry, Gabby and Hermione spent the rest of the night motionless, soaking up the shared warmth and protection of someone they loved.

-o\O/o-

August 10th, 1995

"Steady... hold steady, girl. Good."

Cedric pulled back on his broom shaft slowly. Hermione matched his movements as best she could and brought her mount to a stop fifty meters above the Delacour home. Halfway between Hermione and the ground, a Veela on a new racing broom watched for any sign of trouble.

"It's quite a bit more sensitive than Fleur's other broom, that's for certain."

Hermione kept her eyes on the horizon. The French Alps really were quite pretty and they weren't that far away. Hermione almost felt like zipping over to the mountain chain, touching one of the slopes and zipping right back. Segolene was on a broom too, but she was lying back on hers as if it were a piece of magic floating patio furniture.

"That's a Firebolt for you. It's the little motions that get the most out of a seeker's broom. Any broom less sensitive and you can't possibly expect to catch a snitch."

Introductory seeker lessons. It was time to make Harry proud. Hermione wanted so much to see Harry's face when he sees her riding his broomstick for the first time. Luckily, Cedric missed her blush when the double meaning of her own thoughts caught up to her.

"Wow, who are all those people down there?" Cedric saw something happening behind and below them.

Hermione followed Cedric's gaze to the front drive of the magical estate. Three horse drawn carriages were unloading their passengers in the front courtyard. Hermione glanced in the direction of the gate-house and ward line. Sure enough, a line of shiny black sedans were parked just outside Delacour property. Whatever was happening to Gabby had earned an audience.

"Well..." Hermione looked back at the figures walking from three carriages to the main entrance hall of the maison-forte to look for any clues. "I'd have to say they all look like women from here... but only a few of them have that silver-blond hair that runs in Fleur's family."

Fleur must have seen the two talking as she was climbing to their position quickly.

"Fleur! How big is the gathering tonight? Who are your guests?"

"Do not worry, 'ermione. Zat should be all of zem. Zey are my muzer's and grandmuzer's family and contacts in the Veela community."

"They're all Veela? Even the brunettes and that redhead?" Hermione wasn't the one worrying now.

Fleur grinned. "Zere are many ideas of classical beauty, Cedric, and Veela invented zem all. Don't worry! I will protect your chastity if you want."

"I..." Cedric fought down his blush. Technically, he was... "I just don't want to walk into a room full of them and make a fool of myself."

"Zen I will tell you which rooms to avoid. Only one kind of man can avoid becoming a drooling idiot in a room full of Veela."

"Harry."

"Ten points to Gryffindor, 'ermione. Only a dead man can escape when surrounded by Veela."

"Sirius is still staying with Nathalie, right? How's he do it?" Hermione thought the Veela was being quite territorial at dinner on the thirty-first.

"'ow does 'e do what? She owns 'im. After so many years in prison and zen a year of 'iding out and drinking 'imself stupid, 'e 'as no defense at all to 'er desires." Fleur smirked at how hopeless he really was... like a puppy with a new owner.

"When's the wedding then?" At Hermione's question, Fleur's smirk fell.

"Nathalie would 'ave loved zat. She would 'ave made 'im 'appy even if she is not in love wiz 'im."

Cedric was hooked on the topic now.

"What's stopping he-" Fleur gave him a 'you should know the answer to this one' look. As it turns out he did. "Oh. Pureblood English Lord. Right."

"What's that supposed to mean?" Both Cedric and Fleur looked at Hermione. Looks like English magical law was still a weak point in her education.

"It is illegal for a-" Cedric paused. His father would have said 'dark creature'. "a Veela to become the wife of an English lord. The law is written such that it even covers muggle lords and not just magical ones."

Hermione was shocked. Where was a pulpit when you needed one?

Fleur continued where Cedric had left off. "You see, 'ermione. Veela are not just considered magical creatures, though that would be enough against them for some Englishmen. No. Ze are women who bear only daughters."

Hermione hadn't heard that one before. Why hadn't Hermione heard that one before?

"But, but that would mean that they can't bear the heir to any paternal titles."

"And since all Veela bear Veela daughters, no paternal line can survive having a Veela marry into it. Even lesser sons are warned against us... their children cannot inherit no matter what tragedy may befall the main Lord and his heirs."

Hermione looked down at the women entering the Delacour family seat. She was still missing something.

"'ermione. When Papa dies, 'is cousin will become Lord Delacour. It is not illegal for French lords to wed Veela, but is is considered foolish. Suspicious even. Zere are rumors... all false, of course... zat men 'ave paid Veela to court and marry zeir rivals just to end lines of succession."

Fleur didn't have to say it, but Hermione could tell by the look on her face. Those rumors must have been spread about her own mother. Hermione finally understood. This is why there are so few Veela in the world... why so many of the ones that are around chose the non-magical world over the magical one. There's nothing stopping a rich company executive with no heraldry to speak of from courting a Veela and eventually showering his Veela daughters with money and cars. That actually explains a lot of the super wealthy heiresses that paparazzi follow like starving wolves.

"I see Nathalie made it tonight after all. I should go down to greet our guests." Fleur looked at Hermione. "Could you zree stay by ze back patio... per'aps stay above ze first floor unless you are called upon? I am very sorry-"

Cedric waived off her apology. "Think nothing of it. I don't want to be caught in the wrong place at the wrong time."

"Don't worry, you two!" Segolene was done with her morning nap. "I know just where to keep you two until the virgin sacrifice is called for!"

Segolene flew one quick lap around the group of three. "Of course... if either one of you wanted to get out of it the easy way, I have very reasonable hourly rates!"

"By Jeanne! Nathalie's got her hooks into you now, Segolene."

Segolene blew a raspberry at Fleur on the next pass. "She says I have real talent! She loved my alterations to the Hogwarts and Beauxbatons uniforms... even offered to pay me to make her girls a few copies."

"Nathalie cannot help you get into haute couture, Segolene."

"You'd be surprised. Don't worry, my love. Go see to your Veela guests and I will take care of our non-Veela guests." Segolene flew close enough to buss Fleur's cheeks in mid air. "Until you are ready for us, farewell."

"Fine."

Fleur waved once more to Hermione and Cedric before zipping down to a second floor balcony. She didn't want to come in behind her guests... better to meet them inside.

Segolene smiled brightly at her temporary charges. "So. Either of you wish to not be a virgin by six this evening? Anyone? Going once... twice... fine."

Hermione and Cedric watched Segolene angle down to the back patio.

"D'you... you think she's serious?" Cedric asked Hermione.

Hermione rolled her eyes in response. Boys. Not that grown men were all that different. Speaking of, Hermione began to wonder if Sirius would consider a commitment or a serious relationship that skirted the edges of marriage. He was already quite the rule breaker and it was clear that Nathalie made the old dog deliriously happy. Hermione had some serious thinking to do.

-o\O/o-

Gabby was feeling better. She didn't know why, but she was.

"Up, Little Angel. We need to get you into your robes." Her mother helped Gabrielle stand up from her padded bench in her powder room.

Gabby squinted. She was waking up again but the lights were still very bright around those big mirrors.

"Come on, Gabby. Arms up."

Someone behind her dropped a large set of robes onto the little girl. They were too big by a few centimeters in just about every direction.

"Yves, do something about the size, will you?"

Gabby heard some whispering behind her. Soon the robes fit her perfectly.

"I still think we should try to rebuild the old Order. A High Priestess... proper rituals... everything that our ancestors had..."

"What a nice dream. That worked so well for us three hundred years ago, didn't it? Do you want to be burned at the stake? Do you want your wrists tied to a heavy stone as you are pushed over the side of a boat? Rome and the Wizarding governments have both taken to looking the other way around us recently and that must not change."

Gabby heard this conversation before... lots of times by lots of different women. She idly wondered if she would see this 'Order' when she was a grown-up.

As the two arguing women Gabby's never met before started debating which pair of shoes was the better choice, Gabby looked at herself in her Momma's mirrors. Her heavy outer robes were white. The silk layers under her robes were white. Her stockings were white. All nine shoe options were white. The little flowers placed behind her ears in her silver-blond hair were white.

Gold! There! Gabby smiled. They couldn't take her Harry wand away from her for this. She was allowed to carry one item, a symbol of her life with her to where it would happen. Gabby told them that her wand was her life. Without her wand, so many bad things could have happened to her.

They didn't know. Momma suspected, but she didn't know for sure. Gabby smiled wider. She had something else with her! Even better than her wand!

"Little Angel. You know he shouldn't be inside now, don't you? The Change... it could hurt him." Apolline tried one more time.

"What Momma? I don't know what you mean." Innocent face. Puppydog eyes. Tilt head just a bit and draw a line on the floor with the right big toe.

"That doesn't work anymore, Gabrielle Marion. Not one bit."

Keep it up. She can't last forever.

Momma huffed and turned to another grown-up. They passed a few quiet words back and forth until Momma had the last word.

"It's time, Gabrielle. Follow your mother."

"Yes, Momma."

She remembered what they told her was going to happen. They told her she was going to get angry for no reason. They told her she was going to do things she didn't mean to do. Her own grand-mère said that she should just let the Change take her. It was natural.

Gabby was going to be a big girl soon. Would Fleur and Momma and Poppa call her Big Angel now? After she got bigger, would Harry want to play kissy-face with her too?

Six o'clock.

Little Angel was in the middle of the ballroom. Momma told her to stand right in the middle and Gabrielle did what she was told.

"Now Gabrielle." Momma called. "Please just stand there. Do not sit or walk around or dance... just stand there." Was she in time-out? She'd never been in time-out before! When was she bad?

"Why, Momma?"

"Something wonderful will happen, baby. It may not feel nice, but it will be over soon and then we can have a big party!"

"I still get a party on my birthday? With friends and ice cream and presents?"

"Of course, Gabrielle."

"Okay!"

And so, surrounded by Veela and wrapped in a heavy ceremonial robe which had long openings down either side of the back, Gabrielle just stood there and waited.

Three minutes ticked by. Gabby was fine. Happy even. They were giving her a party soon!

Five minutes later, Gabrielle began to shift back and forth from one foot to the other.

"Are you well, Little Angel?" Apolline studied her child. This was not how Fleur's change went at all.

"Fine, Momma." Gabby spun in place once before setting her foot down and shifting back and forth between feet again. "Momma?"

"Yes, Little Angel?"

"I love you." Gabby loved her Momma sooooo much. She really did! Did Momma know that? Did she really?

"I love you too, Little Angel." Apolline and Fleur looked at each other.

By this time on Fleur's special day so many years ago, she was ranting about how badly she wanted a pony and how her Maman didn't love her enough to give her one. Every Veela in the room had an experience similar to Fleur, and therefore none of them save the Delacour girls had any idea what could be causing little Gabrielle to act so differently.

Gabby saw that Momma and her momma were talking again. Did they know any jokes? Gabby wanted to hear a joke!

A squeaky tittering giggle rang out through the hall.

Why were they all looking at her like that? Was she being all mean and she just didn't know? She didn't feel all mean and angry and stuff. Being in time-out wasn't anything like she thought it would be. It was fun!

A distant set of chimes rang the quarter hour.

As Gabby watched with fuzzy-ish hard to focus eyes, her grandmother finally said something loud enough for her to hear.

"... that little English shit has done to my granddaughter? Don't you see? A whole year early and it's going all wrong. She should be screaming and crying and telling us about how we're not allowed to her birthday parties anymore... but no! Look! She's practically high, she's so happy!" Grandmother Mitterrand was being so mean! "I want to bring the little bastard back to life just so I can kill him myself!"

"Hey! That's not nice. Harry's the best boy in the world! I love him!" Gabby considered getting angry, but that little bit of darkness was swept away in a tide of love that had little Gabrielle feeling like she was floating in an ocean of happy.

"Finally she gets a little fight in her... I want that boy out of you right this instant Gabrielle. He's getting in the way!" Régine was being very nosy today, wasn't she?

"Yes, Grandma Mitterrand." Gabby bonked herself on the head once before losing herself to a giggle fit.

"Gabrielle!" Momma was red faced! How funny is that?

"O- -hick- okay! Kno- -hick- knock, knock, Harry! Come out!" Gabby kept giggling. She couldn't stop the happy now if she wanted to.

Harry materialized right in front of Gabby.

"You! Get out of here NOW!" Régine was angry.

"Not until I've said goodbye to Gabby." Harry ignored the fuming grand matron behind him and looked at his Little Angel. "Hey there! You're doing so good! I don't know what it is these women want to happen, but I think you're brilliant!"

"Thanks! I love you, Harry! And I love Momma and I love Poppa and I love Segolene and Hermione and Grandma Mitterrand and Cousin Nathalie and Misses McGonagall-" Gabby was hopping up and down on the balls of her feet.

Six sixteen. The moon was very, very full. If Madame Mitterrand weren't so focused on what wasn't happening, she might have noticed what was happening. Most of the other Veela surrounding Gabrielle felt... something. It wasn't what anyone expected, but it was building and they were getting nervous.

"I love you too, Gabby."

Gabby had to escalate.

"I love you more!" There was a sing-song quality to her words this time. To anyone paying attention, love and joy just seemed to radiate off of the white robed little Veela in waves so thick they almost distorted the air around her.

Harry couldn't let Gabby win so easily. He swept his arms out wide and called, "I love you this much!"

Gabby was quivering in place. Her arms weren't that big! How was she going to prove she loved him more? In the back of her head, Gabby remembered that she was supposed to let something happen. Something wanted to happen. Maybe that something would help her beat Harry?

"I love youuuuuuu... this much!"

The words 'this much' weren't words so much as they were song... something between a spoken language and the trilling notes of bird song.

Gabby threw her arms open wide but she did more than that. Straining with every fiber of her being, Gabby lifted onto the balls of her feet, threw her arms open and spread her wings.

Her pure white feathery wings.

Gabrielle's creamy skin was covered in soft downy white feathers. Down and contour feathers mixed in with her hair. Her eyes seemed impossibly wide and innocent. Her mouth... Harry had once been told that a Veela's beak was a fearsome and ugly shape. Not Gabby's. It was cute. Pretty even.

Every Veela and ghost in the room was rooted in place, openly gaping at the angel that wasn't so little anymore. More than a few of Gabby's very distant cousins and fellow Veela had fallen to their knees... one or two of them seemed to be praying openly.

A soft, uncertain warble passed through Gabby's beak. What is it?

"Ohhhhhh, Angel. You're the most perfect thing I've ever seen. You win Gabby, I can't do that." Harry ran his ghostly fingers along her white feathery cheek.

She won? She won! She's beat Harry twice now! I win! I love you more! I love everybody more!

Gabby's victory call sounded more like chirps and the ringing of tiny bells than any speech Harry had ever heard before. She raised her hands high, her wings mimicking the action perfectly. Her outermost left and right wing feathers nearly touched about a meter over her head.

In the small gap between Gabby's wings, a magical spark ignited. Without conscious thought, she pulled the wingtips apart and gave the magical spark room to build. After a brief flash, two points of blue-white fire appeared, one near each wingtip, and quickly began

to accelerate around an invisible point between them. Less than a second later, a solid glowing halo of magical fire was buzzing in the air above Gabby's head.

The halo itself began to ring... a slightly wavering tone similar to what one might hear from running their wet finger around a crystal chalice.

Gabby was in heaven, but she wasn't alone in the room. Harry had done good, he said she was a good girl. Why was Momma just standing there? Was she crying? No, Momma, don't cry! Maybe if everyone felt how much she loved them, then Momma could be happy again.

Gabrielle brought her hands down and as her wings followed, the halo of magical fire followed as well. As her wing tips separated, the halo got larger, never straying far from the feathers that spawned it until they touched the floor.

As soon as Gabrielle's halo touched the smooth wooden floor of the Delacour family ballroom, its tone changed to one of a giant church bell being struck and magical fire released in a blinding wave that blew out in all directions. Every Veela engulfed by the wave was knocked flat and the back windows were completely blown out. Such was the force of Gabrielle's love.

"Harry! Gabby!"

Harry turned in response to Hermione's frantic scream. Her voice came through shattered window panes at the end of the ballroom. Were Cedric and the girls outside in the back garden? They must have seen or heard the windows blowing out. Shite.

"Stay with your mum, Gabby. I'll be right back."

Harry spun in place and flew through one of the smashed windows just as Apolline and the others were struggling to get off of the floor.

"Mione!" Harry found Hermione, Segolene and Cedric all about to mount brooms near a marble fountain.

"How many are hurt, Harry? Do we need to call for healers?" Cedric asked those questions.

Bollocks. If there was one nice bloke who absolutely could not be allowed to see Gabby as a mythical being, it was Cedric. His dad and the British Ministry of Magic could not be trusted.

"Don't worry about it. It's only a few nicks and scratches. It's for the best if we give them a few minutes to get fixed up."

Hermione didn't like Harry's response.

"But... but Harry. Surely we could help them get cleaned up-"

"Please, 'mione. It's a Veela thing." Harry looked back at the broken windows behind him for a moment. "They even kicked me out of the room, see? I don't think Madame Mitterrand likes me very much."

Harry could tell that Cedric was almost relieved that he wouldn't have to follow Hermione into a room full of injured Veela. It would still have been a room full of Veela. Harry could also tell that Hermione was unconvinced and Segolene was ready to bolt if Hermione made a move for her broo- Firebolt! Why didn't she... focus, Potter! They can't go in the ballroom, not yet anyway.

"Please trust me. I'm out here, aren't I? If Gabby or Fleur were in trouble, you know I'd ignore Régine and stay by Angel's side, right?"

Hermione nodded hesitantly. Harry would be in there with the Delacours if it were bad, Hermione was sure of it.

A few tense minutes later, a door opened into the garden. Harry, Hermione, Segolene and Cedric all turned from their silent vigil to see Fleur leading a very nervous (and wingless) Gabrielle out to meet them.

"You see Gabrielle? They have all been waiting for you. Give your sisters hugs, won't you?"

Gabby ran over to Segolene and wrapped her arms around the older girl as tightly as she could.

"Happy Veela Day, Little Angel! Or whatever it is that you girls just celebrated."

"I'm not little anymore! You can't call me Little Angel anymore. I'm Angel now not Little Angel just Angel or maybe Big Angel and you will just have to get used to it." Gabby yelled into Segolene's chest

"Whatever you say, Little Angel." Segolene cut off Gabby's protest by running fingers into the long slits in the back of her ceremonial robes and tickling the little Veela's back.

As Gabby released Segolene and latched on to Hermione, two ex-Gryffindors looked at each other. Hermione could wait for the answer, but not for too long. "So when were you going to tell me about you flying my Firebolt?" Hermione flushed brilliantly at Harry's question. Harry watched his girls hug each other. For a moment, all was right with the world.

Behind Harry, Cedric asked Fleur what kind of robes Gabby had on... then he started asking what kind of ceremony they were for. Fleur told him it was a simple coming of age ceremony, one that frequently triggered accidental magic. Cedric seemed to accept the explanation. Good.

Fleur mourned a moment for what could have been. With his Ministry acting the way it was, well, Fleur refused to be Juliette to Cedric's Romeo. Too bad. Aside from being easy on the eyes and resistant to her thrall, he was kind, honest and loyal. Hopefully Cedric's last few days in France would be as pleasant as the past week and a half have been. Even if they were not meant to be, Fleur could still give him a going away present, couldn't she? Fleur smiled. Indeed she could. Cedric didn't know what the look Fleur was giving him meant, but he liked it.

End Chapter

Harry was standing in an open lawn. Gabby sat on her butt before him, spinning a wildflower between her fingers. Hermione's gaze swept over the both of them from her perch on a lawn chair. It was the first night in quite some time that Harry and Gabby were able to cross into Hermione's dreams easily and both of them were quite happy to be free of Gabby's bedroom even if it was back to normal. Nearly all of Gabby's internal fires were extinguished and she was really feeling much better.

"What trick?"

Harry glanced over to Hermione briefly before looking back at Gabby.

"That thing you did with all those ladies around you. You know... you giggled, you told everyone you loved them and then you changed."

"Ohhh... okay." Gabby smiled brightly and sat there and... did nothing.

Harry and Hermione both continued to watch Gabby as she did more nothing for a minute or two. When the petit almost nine year old did begin to move about, it was only to start playing with the blades of grass around her.

"Well?"

At Harry's continued prompting, Gabby lowered her head so the other two couldn't see her face.

"Gabby, sweetie, do you remember how you did it?" Hermione's gentle prompt caused Gabby to shake her head.

"I'm sorry." The wildflower fell out of her grasp. Uh, oh... Harry didn't want Gabby to feel bad.

"Don't worry about it! Now that I think about it, I remember your Mum saying that it would be hard to control for a while after the first time."

Harry sat down on the little girl's right side and pulled her into a hug. Seconds later, Hermione sat down on Gabby's other side to share the love. For a while, three of them just sat there and enjoyed Hermione's dream gardens. There wasn't any fauna in place, but the flora was quite varied and a light breeze tickled the senses. Harry didn't know if he would move on with the girls after both of them passed, but if he did, he hoped that the next plane of existence would be something like this.

A feeling of pure love embraced Harry. Wow, he really hoped that the next plane would be like this.

"Hedwig... quit it."

Wait a tick. Hedwig's never shown up in their dreams before. Who's wing was poking Harry in the side?

He turned his head to the right and found that there was nobody there... but something feathery was still poking him. Harry twisted further around. There was a white wing behind him alright, but it wasn't Hedwig's. Harry spun back around to look at the girl on his left.

"Angel! You did it!"

I did what? The girl in question trilled up at him.

On Gabby's other side, Hermione was gaping in awe at the real live angel snuggled tightly between two ex-Gryffindors.

"Oh my God..."

Hermione tried to get her mind to comprehend what she was seeing. As this was Hermione's dream they were relaxing in, her thoughts began to influence the world around them. The fluffy clouds above opened up just enough to allow a single shaft of sunlight to pierce the sky and bathe Gabrielle in an ethereal glow. Subconscious trick or not, it seemed perfectly natural.

What? Gabby was snapping her head back and forth between her two dream companions. I don't get it.

"Ohhhhh, Gabby." Hermione cooed. "You're absolutely gorgeous."

As Hermione smothered Little Angel in a tight, almost possessive hug, Harry ran his hand gently over the down of her cheek and pulled one finger tip over her cute yet clearly sharp beak. It seemed to have an owl-ish profile. Her beak was mostly blue to match her eyes, though there were a few black specks nearer the bottom and point. Just wait until Hedwig saw this!

That tickles! Harry and Hermione both felt Gabby jerk a little. Hey! I've got my wings back! I wanna see a mirror! Can I have a mirror please, Hermione?

Both Harry and Hermione heard the girl's excited tweets and warbles, but could make neither heads nor tails out of them. By the end of it, Gabby was staring Hermione in the eyes.

"Can... can you repeat that?" Hermione was about to add 'in English' when the girl next to her started again.

Please get me a mirror?

"Angel. We didn't-" But Harry was cut off by Hermione.

"A glass? No... that's not right. You want a mirror?" The English witch was staring right back into Gabby's crystal blue orbs. Gabby nodded eagerly.

Hermione pulled one hand free of the Gabby hug to summon a full length mirror. Hermione's mirror was not unlike the Mirror of Erised in that it was a freestanding full length mirror with a highly detailed frame. With a happy trill, Gabby hopped up and began posing in front of the mirror. While she filled Hermione's dreamscape with noises that seemed to resemble ooh's and ahhhh's, Harry and Hermione looked at each other behind her.

"You understood her the last time?" Harry queried.

"Yes. I could when looking into her eyes." Hermione spared a brief glance at the little angel's back. "I didn't understand before that and I don't get it now... but when I looked into her eyes... yes."

"Then..." Harry wanted to celebrate Gabby's newly discovered special talent, but there was so much to consider. What else could

she do? He'd never met a real angel before. None of them had. No, wait. That wasn't completely true.

"You know... the Bible mentions talking angels fairly often and Jeanne's supposed to have met one before. Maybe I should see if she still remembers anything?" As Harry talked out his idea, he saw something in Hermione's expression that he couldn't quite place. "She could help us understand what's happened to Gabby. Right?"

"That's a good idea Harry. You ought to go see her again anyway... you know. It's not everyone that can say Jeanne of Arc is a friend of theirs. You still want to help her get in the church, don't you?" Harry nodded at Hermione's question. "Good. I have an idea about that. I don't think it will be hard to breach the ward so much as it will be hard to convince her to breach the ward."

"I don't understand."

"Jeanne of Arc," Hermione was having trouble thinking of the spirit as 'Jeanne' like Harry did, "is known for being a truly devout Catholic, Harry. If I'm right about prayer wards, then she might object to the way through... she might think it heretical. Knowing what she was executed for, well, she might rather call us devils and refuse our help."

"But you haven't even told me what you found out yet."

Uh, oh. She's got that 'class is in session' look in her eyes.

"Then let me explain. I've found that prayer wards are, for the most part, a poorly understood topic. Only a handful of magical researchers have spent any time at all documenting muggle magics and what they have documented is inconsistent... even contradictory. Two European books on the subject describe prayer wards as muggles somehow tapping into ley lines underground without understanding what it is they're doing. Apolline and I just finished reading a newer American treatise on the subject which debunks the ley line explanation. According to 'Of God and Magic' by Charles Pinckney, not a one of the churches in the American colonies was situated on ley lines yet they all had weak ward schemes after only a few years of use. He believed that when you put enough muggles in one room and have them pray together that their prayers become a rudimentary spell. Their prayers carry their

beliefs and those beliefs replace intent in spell casting. Furthermore, Muggles don't carry wands, but they do place their faith in icons that can work almost as well. A cross would be the most obvious example, but lesser icons and symbols may work as well due to the sheer number of people who believe in them. What muggles lack in individual power and skill, they make up for in sheer numbers."

"Numbers. Right. How does this get Jeanne in the church?"

Hermione almost rolled her eyes. She had to remember that Harry hadn't done any research on warding before he died.

"Most wards are shaped like giant domes over a property. Think of Headmaster Dumbledore's age line around the Goblet of Fire." They both flinched for a moment, but Hermione soldiered on. "With those wards, if you can get through the outer line unimpeded then they won't affect you anymore. The more powerful and secure wards... like the ones you need permission to enter in Bern and the French Ministry of Magic in Paris... they cover wide areas and are also active within their perimeters."

"Sooooooo some of them are hollow but the really good ones are solid?"

"I'd rather say 'elaborate' or 'highly engineered' than 'really good', but that's about right, Harry. As Muggle's aren't capable of making the 'really good ones' as you call them, you and Jeanne just have to get past the outer shell." Now Hermione was ready for the final point of her lesson. "Apolline tells me that you've already crossed a hollow anti-ghost ward. Do you remember when?"

"Yeah. Yeah! I went inside and Gabby took me... oh."

"Oh is right Harry. We have a way to get you into the Church. I don't doubt Jeanne could sneak in the same way... but can we convince the Maid of Orléans that possessing a little girl isn't wrong in the eyes of God?"

"Shite."

"Language, Harry."

"It's just- you figure out how to help Jeanne... in record time I might add... and I can't see her agreeing to possess someone no matter how many centuries I spend trying to persuade her. I'll go from friend to demon in record time, too."

"You'll figure it out, Harry. You're saving-people-thing is alive and well even if you're not."

Harry and Hermione discussed their options for a while as Gabby preened in front of the mirror. Both teens agreed that a trip to Domrémy-la-Pucelle would be very helpful even if Harry made the trip alone. Much as she may want to tag along, Hermione agreed that him making the trip alone may be best for now... mustn't scare the Catholic Saint away a second time or she may actively avoid Harry in the future.

"Hey! My wings went away again! That's so unfair."

Harry snapped his head from Hermione to Gabrielle. How had they missed it before?

"Mione! Jeanne was a farmer's daughter, right? Why did she take up the sword in the first place?"

"Around Fourteen twenty-four, she was visited by Saint Catherine, Saint Margaret and Saint Michael the archangel. Oh. Oh!"

"Oh is right, 'Mione!" He laughed at her blown raspberry. "I think, given a proper introduction, Jeanne will very much want to meet Gabby."

"Really? Will Jeanne like me? I hope so. I like her. Everyone in my class likes her too."

At that moment, Harry looked at Gabby and gave her a big smile.

Outside, in the bedroom around Gabrielle's sleeping form, Alain and Apolline watched in awe as their youngest daughter once again changed from human to angel without waking up.

"Will she be able to get control over this before returning to school?" Alain asked his wife.

"I... I don't know." Apolline responded as she reached out to hold her sleeping daughter's hand. "And what of her birthday? We can't let anyone see her like this... not even her closest friends. Maman already threatened to have Hermione and Segolene obliviated, but I was able to make her see reason."

Left unspoken was that the same threat would have been leveled at all non-Veela, even Alain.

"We can't keep Little Angel hidden forever. People will find out one day, but we must ensure that the wrong people don't find out first."

Gabrielle would make the full change three more times that night. Her parents watched in equal parts fear and fascination every time.

-o\O/o-

A small hiss and pop came from the fireplace as fresh logs began to catch in the well maintained fire. Cedric didn't seem to notice.

He was stuck trying to say goodbye to Fleur before flooing to the French Ministry of Magic and then making a trip across the English Channel. Desire to return home was completely overwhelmed by a desire to dedicate his life to the beautiful young woman in front of him.

Fleur, of course, could see all of this very clearly on the young man's face. It didn't take a Veela to see how much Cedric loved her now. Was he that good at hiding the depth of his feelings before last night? No. It couldn't be that. Fleur must have simply underestimated her own skills as a lover to have the boy go from hopeful suitor to besotted puppy in less than nine hours.

Perhaps having Segolene join them an hour into it was too much for the inexperienced Englishman? If that were the case then this was the first time inviting the adventurous brunette into her bed had ever been a mistake.

"Please, Fleur... say something." There was desperation in his words.

Only a moment ago, the English Triwizard Champion had said three words. Three words in English though in French the same

declaration is made in two. Did he not see the obstacles between them? Did he think that a few words could change the world? Fleur took his hand in hers.

"What would you 'ave me say Cedric? You are strong and brave and 'andsome and intelligent and a lot of ozer fine zings but what you want cannot come to pass."

"It's Fudge and the Ministry right? I don't care about what they think of you-"

"And what of your parents? Your neighbors? I cannot follow you back to England. You must understand zat at least."

"But just a few words from your lips and I'd be well shot of the place! Just three words, Fleur. That's all I ask." Cedric took a step forward, almost close enough to kiss.

Fleur very, very slowly began to slide back and away.

"Such words. Per'aps you should 'ave gone to 'arry's 'ouse? Gryffindor, no?"

"We in Hufflepuff honor loyalty and hard work above other qualities but we are not cowards. We do follow our hearts. My heart is yours now, Fleur, and I intend to live a long and wonderful life with the woman I love. That woman is you."

Due to her heritage, Fleur could easily see the heat of passion behind his eyes. He did love her... or at least he was as close as a teenaged wizard could get to love while flush with hormones. He did not look at her as Father looked at Mother, but the beginnings of such love were there if you knew what to look for. Veela knew very well what to look for.

She did not love him... but she was attracted to him. Had things been different between their countries, she may have given Cedric the attention he deserved. But with England as it was and English law factored in, one or both of them would have to forsake their futures and defy more than mere common sense for Cedric to get what he wanted.

"I cannot give you what you ask..." She could see the light in his eyes fade just a touch. "...but I can offer you somezing. I value 'ard work as much as you and I intend to make a name for myself in zis world. I do not want people to remember me as ze Delacour Veela zat tied in ze Triwizard. I want people to remember me for great feats I 'ave yet to accomplish. One day I will find time for marriage and children, but I believe zat day is several years off yet."

"I can wait."

Fleur did not think the odds were good, but she knew he believed what he said.

"I would not fault you for seeing anozer before zen. From one Champion to anozer, check any gifts, food and drink given to you for charms and potions from now on. 'o knows 'o you might wake up next to if you do not."

"Thanks for the warning. And if we're both still single in a few years?"

"If your countrymen can collectively pull zeir 'eads from zeir backsides, zen I will give you a chance to court me properly."

"I don't want to wait, but I will."

A chime sounded the hour.

"You must be going. We don't want anyone zinking zat I've kidnapped you for my own wicked amusement."

"I wouldn't resist if you did. Oh, and Fleur?"

"Oui, Cedric?"

"Please don't lose your accent. I'm always so disappointed when I hear Gabby or your mother speaking English properly. You on the other hand... I can't get enough of the way you talk."

Fleur actually blushed. Being desired for something other than her looks or allure was a big turn on for any Veela..

"You should consider a pensieve zen. Something to 'elp you remember me on lonely nights." After spending the last few hours trying to separate herself from the handsome Hufflepuff Champion, Fleur changed course a bit and stepped closer. "Oh, and Cedric?"

"Oui, Fleur?"

"I zink zat we have time for one last kiss. We should make the most of our last moments togezer, for it will be some time before you are zis close to me again."

Despite the fact that they were both standing fully clothed in an open room, Fleur was able to physically remind Cedric of many of the wonderful things they had done together the night before. Cedric put his heart into the kiss, knowing that even if he could not get his heart's desire now, at least she knew how he felt. He would win her heart and her hand one day... he just had to devote himself and never ever give up.

All too soon for Cedric's liking, he stepped away from the woman he loved. With one last pained look back, he let the green flames of floo travel engulf him.

-o\O/o-

Nymphadora Tonks woke up.

She wasn't particularly ready to, but when an alarm spell is keyed to Ennervate, one doesn't tend to stay asleep unless something is genuinely wrong with them. Tonks, or 'prisoner' as the guards referred to her, stood up and waited for a wall to disappear. It was just part of her daily routine now and she had gotten quite used to it. She never really knew which wall was going to vanish on her either. Nice trick, really.

Shortly after she became a prisoner of the French Ministry of Magic, she found herself in what must be a high end magical holding room. The walls, floor and ceiling all looked to be of the same smooth, featureless material. This stone or metal or whatever it was also provided light by glowing. Tonks appreciated the day-night cycle provided but found herself complaining over the lack of shadows more often than not. No doubt there were other protections in the walls that she didn't know about, but as she's been wandless since

her capture and knew shite about wandless spellcasting, she was well and truly stuck.

"Prisoner. Turn and enter the yellow hallway."

"And a bloody good morning to you, Mister Disembodied Voice, Sir."

Tonks stretched for a moment and stood. By the time she was done stretching, she knew the yellow hallway to be behind her so she stepped around her bed and into the yellow hall as told.

She had once seen two halls appear last week. One was the 'right' one and the other was not. Bloody curiosity... Tonks pissed herself screaming in pain when she tried the wrong hall. She did have to admit that the bastards holding her knew how to prove a point.

At the end of the yellow hall, she found herself in front of a door. Her hand was almost at the latch when she jerked it back down. That's how this place worked... you don't touch something unless they say you can. Who 'they' is she could only guess at, but if the color schemes and furniture design was any indication, then at least one of them was a Star Trek geek.

"Prisoner. Pass through the door."

Oh, goody. Every time they've let her pass through a door, there was an actual person on the other side. She liked it when they let her talk to other people. This place could be so bloody lonely. She opened the door and stepped into the room beyond.

"Look at you all grown up! Little Nymphadora, I can't tell you how happy I am to be here with you today!"

There were four men in the room on the other side of a large table, but she focused on just one. He looked much better than his Wanted Poster showed, but that was to be expected when he was free and she was the one in trouble. Tonks briefly considered returning to the yellow hall, but thought better of it. She may not have been a Gryffie like the man standing before her, but she was no coward.

"Tonks. My name is Tonks, you prat."

"Is that any way to speak to your family head, Nymmie?"

"Mum was blasted off the tapestry. We're not Blacks. I seem to remember you getting removed from the family tree as well." She tried to put some heat behind her glare, but seeing as how she was the prisoner in this room and he was not, well there wasn't much intimidating going on.

"Shows what you know." The man across from her brushed some imaginary lint off his shoulder. "I, Lord Sirius Black of the Ancient and Noble House of Black, do now in front of witnesses reinstate my cousin by blood, Nymphadora Tonks into the family."

Sirius raised his left hand, on which a large black and gold ring sat.

Tonks stood there, frozen.

Sirius added the next line in a stage whisper. "This is where you kiss my ring and accept me as your Lord."

"But... but why should I? You're a wanted criminal. You betrayed the Potters!"

Sirius just looked skyward... not that there was a sky to look at... and sighed. He then pulled out a wand and held it aloft. Tonks tried not to flinch, but she was really near her wit's end standing helpless in the same room with the worst traitor in English modern magical history. He saw the flinch, of course.

"Oh, for the love of Merlin!" He raised his wand high causing her to take a fearful step back. "I, Sirius Black, swear on my life and magic that I did not betray the Potters to He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named. It was Peter Pettigrew that framed me and ratted out the Potters."

Sirius lowered his wand.

"There! Happy? Please, Nymmmie, sit down."

Maybe it was the stress of being held prisoner for Merlin knows how long or maybe it was the fear of being hexed by Sirius Black, but for whatever reason, Tonks pretty much fell apart as soon as she sat down. The official looking French aurors in the room remained impassive as this kind of emotion was to be expected on occasion.

Sirius calmly walked around the table and began to rub the crying metamorph's shoulders.

"It'll all be better soon, Nymmie. That's why I'm here... still want you to kiss the ring, though. I was serious about that bit. Well... I'm always Sirius, but this time I'm serious. Seriously."

Over the next several hours, Nymphadora Tonks saw all charges against her dropped and her freedom returned. There was a price, of course. Nymphadora was required to swear to two different Unbreakable Vows: one which prevented her from committing criminal acts against innocent French citizens or knowingly supporting anyone who intends to commit such acts against innocent French citizens, and one in which she swore loyalty to Lord Sirius Black. If Sirius ever wanted the young woman to die, all he had to do was order her to kill an innocent Frenchman and she'd fall dead on the spot, stuck between two vows.

Luckily for her, Lord Sirius Black lightened up on the prank commands after a few rounds of 'I'm a Little Tea Pot' and told her what brought him here today.

The Granger family needed a trustworthy and talented bodyguard. A young metamorph fresh from auror training would be infinitely more useful than a mentally and physically damaged man who still needed time to remember a lot of spells and other day to day things, things that Azkaban stole from him one nightmare at a time. Sirius would defend Hermione just like Harry told him to... and now so would ex-auror Nymphadora. England owed the boy far more than that.

-o\O/o-

She was praying again, in the same place just like last time. Good. Harry didn't want to search all of France for one ghost, not that he knew where to look aside from in front of churches for this spirit.

He moved into the open plaza in front of the church in Domrémy-la-Pucelle and waited for Jeanne to finish her prayers. She looked up on occasion but didn't look Harry's direction until mid-morning, perhaps an hour or two after he spotted her. Considering how quickly she flew from Gabrielle last time, Harry didn't want to startle the girl.

When she did finally look in his direction, she smiled. Perfect. Harry glided over to Jeanne.

"Good morning, Jeanne. I hope I'm not disturbing you." He called out.

"Harry! It's good to see you again. Have you come to pray at my church?"

Harry shook his head. "I could, but I really came to see you today."

"Really?" Jeanne tilted her head and studied him for a moment. "You have not come to court me, have you?"

"Hmmm? Oh, no!" Harry's cheeks darkened even as his hands shot up in denial. "Really, you're a nice girl and all, but I'm spoken for."

Jeanne grinned in response. "You are here to see me and yet you have not come courting and you are not here to pray. May I ask why you are here, Harry?"

Harry lost his smile. This was going to be the hard part. He's been thinking about just what to say to the French Saint before him almost non-stop since Hermione told him about prayer wards the other night. He wanted to help her... he wanted to know if there was anything she could tell him about angels... and he wanted to be honest. The trick was getting her interest without being too truthful in the beginning. Harry had an idea of what to say, but so much depended on Jeanne.

"I think... I think I might be able to help you get in the church."

Jeanne immediately lost her warm smile and her eyes narrowed slightly.

"How?" Harry could hear the mistrust in her voice.

"Well... long story actually. You remember when I told you that I rescued a little girl from a lake?"

Jeanne nodded.

"She can get us in. We've done the same thing once before so I'm pretty sure it will work."

"What did you do?"

"She let my spirit enter her body and she carried me in." Harry made sure to look Jeanne in the eyes. He needed to be confident.

"You... you possessed her?"

"Sort of... yeah."

"No."

Shite. Of course a religious girl wouldn't accept spiritual possession as anything other than evil.

"I thought you might say that. Would it help if I told you she was an angel?"

"It would help if you didn't lie to me! Leave. I will not have you spreading the Devil's influence in my home."

"I can prove it! Just let me come back one more-"

"No! Begone!"

Jeanne began to advance on Harry's position. He wasn't exactly sure what one ghost could do to another, but then he wasn't very keen on finding out either. Harry began to back away.

"You'll believe me when you meet Gabrielle. I know you don't believe me now but I really want to help you."

"You can help me by burning in Hell!"

Seeing no alternative, Harry turned and left. Doubt gnawed at the plan in his head. Would Jeanne be willing to talk next time? Would she immediately turn on him? Would Gabrielle be able to change before Jeanne got violent?

Was Gabrielle really a modern day angel, one that Jeanne would accept? She had to be. The feathery wings... the halo... how could she not be?

This didn't go at all like Harry wanted. When they came back, Gabby would have to be able to control her change and do it on command or Jeanne would not tolerate their presence.

-o\O/o-

"How are you, Severus?"

"Quite well, my Lord. Are the potions working as expected?" Professor Snape bowed deeply as he addressed the Dark Lord.

"They do what is required."

The bleeding stopped some time ago, but none of Voldemort's wounds were truly healing. Were it not for his potions master, he surely would have returned to the empty desperate existence from which he labored so hard to escape. There was silence until Severus came back up from kissing the trim of his Lord's robes.

"Tell me of the defenses."

As Severus opened his mouth to speak, he also began to arrange a treasure trove of exotic and freshly made potions on the table next to Lord Voldemort's current throne in Malfoy Manor. Many were worth more than Snape's bodyweight in gold. Over half of the ingredients came from Hogwarts' private stores. A special levy would be assessed on muggleborn and halfblood students next year to pay for restocking.

"There are several student level wards and traps in place around the site, but none are harmful and there aren't any that I or Malfoy Senior couldn't disable in seconds. I begin to think that the Headmaster is holding it right out where you can see it, not unlike the Philosopher's Stone."

"You are right, of course. He wants to confront me on Hogwarts grounds." Scars moved out of the way as a smile formed. "He will get his wish in time, but I doubt he will like the results. Tell me... has the old man learned of Malfoy's plan?"

"He has, my Lord. Auror Shacklebolt learned of the plot from fellow aurors and forwarded a rough outline to Albus. He is not as concerned as I thought he would be."

"Has he attempted to warn the Delacours?"

"Surprisingly... no."

Voldemort made a face half-way between a grimace and a grin. The pains were spiking again.

"Perhaps he wishes to sneak in at the last minute and save whomever Lucius manages to catch... if he manages to catch someone. He's already failed me more than once since my first encounter with the Potter boy and it will be his undoing in the end. Encourage your godson to act independently of his father, Severus. I fear the Malfoy line will wane unless young Draco takes my advice to heart."

"As you command."

-o\O/o-

August 18th, 1995

Within the Delacour maison-forte, green flames burst into being in one of the main fireplaces.

"Welcome back Misses McGonagall." Hermione gave a warm hug to her tutor and role model.

The two witches exchanged pleasantries for a while before moving into a ballroom where Virginie was clearly setting up for a large party. Every few seconds, Dobby would -pop- into the room and drop something off for Virginie to work with only to -pop- away again.

"Yes, yes... this will do quite nicely." Minerva took a deep breath and centered herself as she surveyed the room.

"How so, Professor?" Minerva smiled at Hermione's slip.

The young witch rarely made such mistakes, so when she did they were all the more endearing.

"Mistress Delacour has instructed me on the theme of our lunch time party, Hermione dear. You and I have just over three hours to decorate this hall before the first guest is expected. Angels with halos, if they haven't told you already."

Hermione giggled. "Oh, they did. A day full of little angels for our Little Angel... though she will tell you she's not so little anymore."

The ex-deputy headmistress had heard such off hand comments before... even with the same inflection. She was the Head of House for hundreds of young witches who learned what it meant to be a girl and eventually a woman within the Scottish magical boarding school. Why, the old Scot gave The Speech to dozens of young Gryffindors over the years. She did draw the line at providing such services for her young male charges and left it to the fates and upper years to educate the younger boys... the school was usually short of wizard staff members who were both willing and well suited to be relied on for such things.

"Is it her time already?" Decorations could wait for a few minutes yet.

Hermione nodded. The next words out of her mouth were much quieter. Not so much whispers as a softly spoken secret.

"I must say I was quite surprised when Apolline announced that all of the witches of the family would help talk Gabby through it. Even I was let in on this group version of The Talk. Did you know that it's part of Veela culture to have as many family and close friends participate as possible? By the end of the night, I think I was blushing more than Gabby." A soft rose hue was spreading across her cheeks even as she relayed the story.

"Surely it wasn't that different from your own family?"

"Mum was very careful and supportive, but it was just her. And Mum most certainly did not tell me about her first comically failed attempt at fellatio."

Minerva was aghast. "Surely Apolline didn't-

"She didn't. Madame Mitterrand did. Apolline took it upon herself to describe her First Time and some of the dos and don'ts of responsible intercourse."

"And... and the girls took part as well?"

"Fleur pointed out common moral implications of love and intercourse while Segolene expounded upon the subject of sapphism and countered morality with emotion and biology." Hermione paused for a moment.

"I was quite embarrassed to admit, in front of Gabby I might add, that aside from my studies on the subject and the scant contact I've had with Harry, I was effectively as innocent as she was."

Hermione briefly looked around to see if anyone was listening. If Hermione hadn't already had Minerva's interest, she got it now.

"I was nervous at first... extremely so. But after the first half hour of lessons and stories of love and cramps, I swear I would have payed to get into that little celebration. Every girl should be so lucky to learn about love and life from Veela... they really know what they're talking about."

"I don't know what to tell you, Hermione. I was brought up in a more traditional home up until war ravaged my family line. My mother explained what would be expected of me on my wedding night and told me to accept my future husband's desires for all else that did not rate eternal damnation. I did what I could for the witches of Gryffindor House but there are a lot of broom cupboards in that drafty old castle. I can't help but feel I could have done more for some of the girls who were forced to quit school early to focus on their... families."

Hermione took Minerva's hand. "You were there for us when we needed you. I don't know if you ever heard, but up in the girl's dorm, we called you Auntie Min."

"Thank you dear. That really means a lot coming from you." Auntie Min held back the emotion that threatened to cancel their lessons outright. A ballroom needed decorations after all. "Right. Wands out. Angels and halos, Miss Granger, and I want to see steady improvement in both quality and quantity this morning."

Hermione curtsyed. "Yes, Auntie Min."

Auntie Min smiled at her very favorite student, yes even more than Harry, and began conjuring and transfiguring party decorations.

In another room of the same home, Gabrielle and Harry were practicing the art of being happy-but-not-too-happy.

"Puppies."

Gabrielle just sat there and looked bored. It was a very cute kind of bored as she was in a grown-up sized chair and her shiny patent leather shoes didn't touch the floor.

"Kittens."

That was harder, but she still maintained control.

"Kittens playing with puppies under the Christmas tree annnnnnnnd they're for you!"

Gabrielle bit her lip and kicked her legs furiously. Harry could feel the love and happiness radiating off of his little charge though she did not change.

-pop-

"Young Miss. You have two visitors. Gigi Bruyere and Aimee Devereux have arrived." Zoé intoned formally.

"I'll greet them!" Gabby jumped out of her chair and began to sprint to her friends.

-pop-

Harry got over his shock at suddenly being the only one in the room and flew after his Angel.

"Wait!"

But she didn't wait. She hadn't seen Amiee and Gigi since that day two weeks ago when she threw up all over Aimee's sundress. That

was a day Gabby really wanted to forget. Harry still hadn't caught up to the girl when he felt an immense wave of love wash through his connection to her. Bollocks.

Harry passed through the last wall only to take in the sight of a pair of white feathery wings hovering over six shiny dress shoes. No, wait. There were three girls (one of them an angel at the moment) and they were hugging each other so tightly that they merely appeared to be a pair of wings with a prismatic mix of skirts and six girlishly clad feet. There was also a little bit of brown, blonde and silver-blonde hair poking out above the wings, but not much.

"Gabrielle! What-" Apolline slid to a halt after sprinting into the room. "My God. I felt that. Everyone in the house felt that! Girls? Girls!"

Apolline stepped up to the three hugging girls and tried to separate them, which was harder than it sounds. Every step closer to Little Angel reduced her mother's panic and increased the love she felt. Gabrielle's own thrall was in full effect and it did not discriminate between sexes or blood relations. This was not her mother's thrall.

Instead of trying to pull the young witches apart, Apolline reached around to embrace the three of them. Once the group hug was successfully expanded, Apolline began to rain little kisses of adoration upon the head of her Little Angel.

A soft avian cooing could be heard from the middle of the love ball.

Harry could feel the thrall... pure love and happiness pulled at him through the link he shared with Gabrielle. Luckily for him, there must have been something about being dead that suppressed the thrall or he would have launched himself into Gabby forever.

He saw movement out of the corner of his eye. "Maman! What-"

"Don't enter the room, Fleur!" Harry put himself between the four-female love fest and two more potential victims in Fleur and Segolene.

"What happened, Harry?" Segolene called when Fleur proved too confused to respond.

"Gabby's thrall. It's out in force right now."

"But... but they're not men. Why is she pulling in females? Sweet Jeanne, I can feel it too. Why can I feel it?" Segolene learned to ignore a lot of weird things living with Veela, but this was a whole new level for her.

"Because... because Gabrielle isn't like other Veela. Those feathers you see are hers. She... she really is an angel." Fleur seemed to pull into herself a bit while saying that. "I wanted to tell you, but my grandmother forbade it. If, if others knew then who knows what they would demand of Little Angel."

While Segolene looked at Fleur and Fleur looked at the floor, Harry wracked his brain for a way to fix the problem. He mentally broke the problem down to see if a solution would make itself known before Régine or someone else came into the room and made a snap decision. To begin with, Gabby saw her friends and became happy enough to change and release her thrall. Gigi, Aimee and Apolline were all caught in said thrall. The problem was that Gabby hasn't stopped. Love is still rolling out of the feathery girl in heavy waves and neither her school friends nor her mother appear to be moving away. How to fix it?

What would Hermione tell him in a situation like this?

'It's obvious, Harry.' Virtual Hermione rolled her eyes. 'She needs to be pulled out of her trance-like state. Might I suggest a strong negative stimulus to counter the positive feedback loop?'

Harry silently thanked Hermione even though she had yet to enter the room.

"Fleur? Can you do the whole 'angry mother' thing and bring Gabrielle out of it?" Two witches stared at him.

"What would I know about the whole 'angry mother' thing? I almost never got punished for anything."

Segolene heard her dear friend's response and interrupted.

"You know... yell her full name and how disappointed you are in her." The brunette whispered a few more lines into Fleur's ear.

Something about how her own mother used to yell a lot when they spent more time in the Royal household.

"Oh, well, I suppose I could try that." Fleur took a deep breath and did her best scary angry mother impersonation. "GABRIELLE MARION DELACOUR! What in God's name do you think you're doing?"

Harry saw the words pass through Gabby's wings like a bolt of lightning. A moment later, the wings themselves uncoiled in spite of Apolline's position outside of their embrace. The three girls and one mother who were still tightly embracing stayed where they were until soft moans and hiccups started to come from Gabrielle.

Fleur peeled her mother off of the other three so that she could get to Gabby.

"W-wh-what di-id I d-do? Whatever it w-was, I- I'm sorry!"

As Fleur softly began to apologize to her little sister and calm her down, Segolene pulled Gigi and Aimee to the side. All three of the non-Veela witches were staring at the trembling Gabrielle with awe... the kind of awe that is not shown to fellow humans or even mere mortals for that matter. Apolline was only just now beginning to see the damage that had already been done to their family secret.

Harry looked around the room. "Mione thought something like this might happen. Luckily, she's been reading up on magical contracts. She could probably have one written up by morning."

"Nonononono! We're gonna magic pinkie swear on it!"

Gabrielle shot out of her sister's embrace and came within arm's reach of her two very bestest friends ever. Her right hand came up in a fist with her pinkie out in a little hook. As everyone in the room over the age of ten watched, Aimee and Gigi both hooked their pinkies onto Gabby's.

"Do you promise not to tell anyone what you've seen? Do you promise that me being an angel is secret? Really super secret?"

"Sure!" "Okay!"

Gabby spun around to meet Segolene's gaze. "Your turn."

"You don't actually expect that to work do you?" The older brunette held out her hand, little finger extended as the three pre-teens had just done.

"Just you try it and see!" Gabby locked pinkies with Segolene and repeated the same questions that she spoke aloud less than a minute earlier.

"Sure... why not." The brunette was still coming to grips with the idea that her little sister is a real, live angel but that didn't damage her ability to reply with sarcasm.

"Segolene! Don't trick them into believing such childish promises will be accepted. No-one must hear of Gabby's abilities."

Everyone could see Segolene's face switch to anger as she wheeled around on her best friend since early childhood.

"Well of course I'm not going to flit about with these two like some social butterfly and tell all of your guests that Gabrielle's a... that she's... a..." Segolene turned around and stared at Gabrielle again. "You mean to tell me that magic pinkie swears actually work?"

All three little girls immediately nodded. Apolline couldn't accept that as proof enough, so pulled out her wand.

"I'm really sorry, young ladies, but I need more assurances."

Again and again, Apolline tried to charm, trick and treat the secret out of her three targets only to get nothing in return. They couldn't even mention it to just Gabrielle unless they used the very vaguest of terms. Apolline accepted defeat ten minutes later.

"Very well. It looks like Hermione's fledgling legal skills will not be called upon tonight. However, if I hear anything out of any of the three of you, then Obliviation will be the very best you can expect."

There was a respectful round of nods and 'Yes, Lady Delacour's before the mood in the room changed.

"So it's a secret now."

"Yes, yes! A secret!"

"A big one."

"Uh, huh."

"So when do we get to hear the rest of it?"

Harry was now beginning to see a parallel between the Weasley twins and these two friends of Gabby's.

"Did God talk to you?"

"Was it Jeanne? You said Harry talked to Jeanne and she didn't run away. Has she been waiting all this time for you?"

"Is that why she's a ghost? Did she not go to Heaven just so she could meet you?"

"Are you a Saint now too? Do we pray to you or what?"

"Can you get rid of that itch on my butt? Maman's tried lots of potions but they don't seem to be doing anything."

As the list of questions began to pile up, Aimee and Gigi soon found themselves unable to ask certain things. Somehow a line was drawn by the magic of the pinkie swear and they were not allowed to cross it for anything. Hesitantly, Gabby started to answer what questions she could... not that she had answers to every question.

Over to one side, Segolene half listened to the Little Girl Questions while she also whispered a few of her own to Fleur. It seems that she was wrong all those years ago. She didn't grow up with a Bird Princess; she grew up with a baby angel and a family of demi-angels.

-o\O/o-

In the city of Bayeux, Normandy, a group of silver-blond haired women and their brown haired companion began to take in the sites. They ate brunch together... went window shopping and visited outside the Musée de la Tapisserie de Bayeux. They strolled

through the local parks. They also drank from personal flasks quite regularly.

French aurors lined the streets, though they were not identifiable as such. Wards were discreetly set throughout several city blocks to ensure that the locals and tourists would still overlook any magical discharge. The entire fields of Behavioral and Memory Charms were constantly evolving since non-magicals managed to record sound and light so many decades ago and what was cast today reflected that change. Unlike the closed pureblood kingdom across the English Chanel, most continental governments felt that staying one step ahead of their non-magical neighbors was more effective than pinning their future on Obliviators.

Why go through all of this trouble for a birthday party? Monsieur Delacour didn't. He set up an elaborate trap.

He was right to let aurors sift through Mister Diggory's trunk earlier in the summer. While most of the young man's possessions were innocent enough, they had found very subtle tracking charms and trace amounts of a potion completely unknown to French Ministry researchers. Where were these charms and potions found? Why, in four nicely wrapped gift boxes; each of which held delicate jewelry.

Before Cedric's trunk was returned to him, a French magical jeweler recreated each of the four pieces exactly; Cedric was able to give his gifts to Fleur, Gabrielle, Hermione and Segolene without ever realizing that they were not originals.

And what became of the originals? Once the potions were carefully stripped off, they were held in storage for a day like today. As today was Gabrielle's birthday, a would be kidnapper or assassin might expect their quarry to be enjoying themselves and therefore lax in their own protections. Let them think that.

As a group of polyjuiced aurors paraded around the city of Bayeux, the real birthday celebrations were coming to a close. Guests were hugged, social connections were reinforced and friends were played with. Soon it would be time to send all of the guests home so that the Delacour family and a few select associates could celebrate privately.

-o\O/o-

Domrémy-la-Pucelle.

Harry was determined to get it right this time.

He had it in his mind to pacify a French national heroine and Patron Saint while also pleasing a very special birthday girl. It was risky, but then he was still a Gryffindor who suffered a chronic 'saving people' thing.

"You remember the plan, Angel?"

The little girl sitting next to Harry about one hundred meters behind the local church nodded quickly.

"She's in the open square again, just like last time. Poppa and his work friends put up wards last night to make most people look away. You're gonna bring her into those trees between her house and the church and then you're gonna help me change. Right?"

"That's right, Angel."

"I'm glad Jeanne likes you. This is going to be fun!" Gabby smiled brightly at the ghost in front of her.

Harry felt the urge to cough and look away. Yes, it was reckless and a bit dishonest, but then he just couldn't see another way. Still, he was careful not to tell anyone of his second trip to this picturesque little village lest anyone try to stop him from seeing this plan through. Besides, Gabby did want to have a day out and this was not the kind of place that the average British dark wizard would care about much less spy on, right? They'd cover Paris or the Riviera if anything.

"I'm sure it'll turn out fine. Let's go."

Three minutes later, Harry found himself nervously gliding up to a short haired ghost praying in the middle of the noonday sun.

"Hello, Jeanne."

"You. What are you doing here? Didn't I make myself clear last time?" Hands which had been held together in prayer were now balled and pressing into her thighs.

"Look, I said I could get you into the Church and I meant it. I said Gabrielle was an angel and I meant it." Harry held his arms out in a pleading manner.

"You meant to tempt me into sin is what you meant. You'll not tempt me away from my God by trickery and witchcraft!"

Harry got the sinking feeling that if he was going to succeed, it would take a fair mix of trickery and witchcraft.

"You can either follow me as a friend to meet Gabrielle or you can try to kick me out of your home town and you will still meet Gabrielle. Either way, you should follow me."

Harry spun about and left at a brisk pace. As Gabby's hiding spot was barely a stone's throw away, Harry was in front of Gabby little more than a second later. A very angry dead French girl followed him right to Gabrielle.

From Gabby's perspective, meeting Jeanne face to face was one of those very special things that she only hears about in storybooks and history lessons about people who aren't her or anyone she knows... so when the ghost of Jeanne d'Arc came face to face with her, she didn't see the anger in the Catholic Saint's face. The hero worship wouldn't let her.

"Hi!"

Gabby had a brain fart. Was she supposed to be doing something? Whatever. Jeanne d'Arc was right in front of her! Wow!

"This is your angel? She is but a little girl! I knew you were lying! How long have you been corrupting this innocent little thing?"

'What?' Gabby's brain froze up. Jeanne d'Arc didn't like Harry Potter? Why ever not? He was the greatest boy ever. He saved her from the lake and everything.

"Hey, stop that! I am too an angel!"

"No, you are not!"

"Am too, and I can prove it!"

Gabby and Harry had talked about this part too. The little girl scrunched up her nose, closed her eyes and tried hard to think happy, loving thoughts. Puppies and kittens at Christmas. Momma and Poppa showering her with kisses. Big Sissy Flower saying how proud she was when Gabby finished her first ballet recital.

Only, it wasn't working. Had they practiced not-changing so much before her birthday party that she couldn't do it anymore?

As Gabrielle tried to feel the love, Jeanne started to yell at Harry again. What was wrong with her? Why did she have to be so mean? Gabrielle began to focus on all that Harry was to her and what he had done for her and how unfair it was that Jeanne didn't like Harry. The little witch opened her eyes. She was determined. Jeanne needed to shut up and apologize right now!

You can't talk to Harry that way! High pitched chirps mixed with harsh barks.

Both ghosts stopped arguing and looked into the angry little girl's eyes.

Harry's not lying and I am an angel and I don't want to hear another mean thing from either of you!

As Gabrielle worked herself into a fit of righteous anger, white wings reached into the sky above her and collected a blue-white halo of power between them.

Gabrielle won the argument.

-o\O/o-

Deep inside the British Ministry of Magic's Auror Division offices, Lucius Malfoy and Minister Fudge watched an assault group assemble.

"Well, Lucius. What do you think?" Fudge looked on with equal parts worry and eagerness. "Will we be able to bring Miss Granger back with this many wands?"

Lucius smiled and watched as the idiotic light wizards checked their gear and polished their wands. Those constant bribes and threats to the Daily Prophet's editor and the British Wizarding Wireless Network manager were finally going to pay off. As he looked over the group of aurors, he did a mental review of their pedigrees.

"They're proper purebloods, Cornelius, every one of them." Lucius gave the Minister a reassuring smile. "With thirteen magically powerful English Wizards, a few school age half-breeds and mudbloods out on the town with their parents shouldn't be any trouble at all. Aside from tracking spells, each of our targets today are blessed with the opportunity to try out a new magic suppressor potion that I expect the Ministry will one day use to keep the wrong sort subdued. All of Amelia's fits and fears will be laid to rest soon enough."

"No doubt, my friend... no doubt." Minister Fudge stepped a little closer to his chief advisor and lowered his voice. "So... claiming a life debt on Granger when she comes back, are you? I mean- I understand that she's just a muggleborn... but she's very young, not unpleasant looking and quite well known. Narcissa doesn't have to know, does she?"

The blonde aristocrat almost stared down his nose at the minister. To be fair, he would give the worthless girl to Draco and his friends as a learning aid... for a variety of subjects. Still, the corrupt tool standing before him didn't need to know that.

"I will need to spend quite a lot of time with my young ward to bring her back to the light. It will be quite an imposition to be her magical guardian, but I will manage. I daresay she will have to be moved into Slytherin quarters at the beginning of next school year so that my son can keep an eye on her and watch for any signs of a relapse." Lucius rolled the snake head of his cane between his fingers. "And how will the Ministry be making use of its share of the Potter estate?"

"Widows and orphans fund, of course." Cornelius gave his friend a knowing wink. "I'm sure someone in need will find it a welcome windfall."

There was a sudden upswing of activity coming from the auror captain and his lieutenant at the other end of the room. "Why don't

you go back to your office, Cornelius. I'll send the captain along when he's ready to report our great victory over the dark creatures massing in Europe. Should make for spectacular reading in the Prophet tomorrow, I'm sure."

"I look forward to it!" With a tip of the hat, Minister Fudge walked out of the auror ready room.

"Captain Sharpe." Lucius caught the eye and ear of the Auror captain. "Remember what we discussed."

"Right, sir. I haven't forgotten how them birds done my cousin in. John was a good man and a good auror." The auror captain spat on the floor, much to Lord Malfoy's discomfort.

"And if things go poorly?"

"I'm to contact you first and Auror Command second."

"I'm sure you'll do a fine job Captain Sharpe."

As Lucius stepped back to allow the Captain to re-check his map and the talismans provided by the Department of Mysteries, the lieutenant began creating portkeys. Their targets have settled down again... this time in the middle of a park. Surrounding and overwhelming the targets should be fairly simple.

"Three minutes!" At the Captain's call, thirteen men grabbed at the newly made outbound portkeys. "Wands out!"

-o\O/o-

"... so in conclusion, I'd like to apologize once more for not giving you a full explanation of how I think we can help you and why. I tried to do things the easy way because the right way looked impossible. You are an intelligent woman and I simply tried to trick you. You deserve better."

A very penitent Harry Potter looked over to his Angel. The Angel he saw was the normal silver-blonde super cute Gabby, not the purest of pure feathered Angel of a few minutes ago. Hopefully that meant she would be in a better mood now.

Gabby's hands were on her hips and she was trying very hard to do the 'stern mother' look. If he didn't feel genuinely guilty for deceiving Jeanne, he might have bust his gut laughing at her. Luckily, Gabby didn't notice.

"Th-thank you, Harry." Jeanne nervously glanced at the second angel she had seen in the last six hundred years. "Would you please explain how you can help me? And why you would? I- I mean if our Lord's messenger will permit?"

"Lord's messenger?" Gabby scratched her head. "I don't have a job yet; I'm just a little angel. I only got my wings eight days ago."

Gabby looked up to Harry. "Do you think God will want to hire me when I graduate from Beauxbatons? All the other angels work for Him, don't they?"

"I'm not sure Gabby. I may be dead, but God's never spoken to me personally and you're the only angel I've ever met." With Gabby's interruption dealt with, Harry turned to better deal with Jeanne's questions. "Jeanne. When you were little... alive and little like Gabby here... did strange things happen around you? Things that you couldn't explain- you could even say those strange things were magical?"

Jeanne's eyes shot wide open and she slid back half a step. Harry figured this discussion was going to be hard for the both of them.

-o\O/o-

"Gawain." One bleeding British auror gasped out.

"Hector." Called another.

"And Boris. That's five."

Captain Sharpe cursed. Three more down after that damned ambush claimed Dennis and Tim and that's not even counting the three broom riders that are even now trying to make a disillusioned dash for the Channel. Now it's just him and four others not bleeding like a stuck pig after the Frenchies started using those damn muggle firelegs. Sharpe had fired off patronus messengers to both Lord

Malfoy and to Amelia Bones as soon as he realized that there were more aurors in the park than muggles.

Lord Malfoy told him that all four birds had to get back to England or die. Sharpe was fine with that. After Auror Dawlish was murdered and Auror Tonks was kidnapped in Bern, a lot of the Old Family type aurors were eager to do some damage to the other side. Pity about young Nymphadora... more than a few of the blokes would stop working and stare at her arse when she walked through the department in those muggle getups she favored.

Sharpe could only take a grim satisfaction in the thought that he personally executed all three Veela whores once his lieutenant noticed the return portkeys weren't working. Fucking half-breed dark creatures don't deserve to live anyway, do they? Sure, a few of his team were horrified that he did it, but this just lit a fire under their bums to get out of France that much quicker.

Sharpe looked at the bound and cursed mudblood. She was obviously in a lot of pain, what with the Reductor curse she caught in the hip... little cunt shouldn't have been running away, right? They came here for her; the least she could do is sit still and be rescued.

Spellfire was beginning to walk up their flank again. This did not look good. And the little mudblood didn't look at all scared... just angry. Not really like a silly little school girl at all really. Now that he thought about it, the Captain remembered her casting a couple of really strong curses before they managed to get an Incarcerous past her guard. Bright girl or not, some spells take years of practice even after you've learned them. Her last flame-cutting curse was one of those.

Oh, bloody hell.

Captain Sharpe told his men to pull up more stone shields and smokescreens... it was time for him and the bitch witch to have a little chat.

"Legilimens."

Merlin, but this girl's got some serious occlumency barriers! How? No more mister nice auror.

"Crucio!"

Her high pitch screeching almost drowned out the yelling of his last teammates as they prepared for another French assault.

"Now. Let's try this again." Sharpe took a deep breath and leveled his wand right between her eyes. "Legilimens!"

Much better. Oh, bloody hell, this isn't Granger! Fuck- those dead Veela weren't Veela at all! This witch is a polyjuiced French auror... they all were! All of this planning... all of the good English sons that obviously won't be making it home today... all for nothing.

Wait, what was that? Sharpe pushed a little harder with his probe until he was able to find a meeting the little slag attended before playing bait today. If he could just... there! The real targets went to some little town called Domrémy-la-Pucelle.

Captain Sharpe pulled out of the French witches brain (at least she was always a witch) and took one last look at her. She actually didn't look half bad like that, you know? What a waste.

"Reducto." Sharpe's curse caused the woman's throat to disappear in a fine red mist.

With this one bit of useful news which may end up costing England as many as thirteen aurors, Captain Sharpe sent another patronus messenger to Lord Malfoy. In it, he explained the hopeless situation as well as the location of the real Delacour family.

Right before he could manage a patronus to Madam Bones, a 7.62x51mm NATO standard round passed through his chest from back to front at over eight hundred meters per second. Sharpe himself didn't understand what kind of wound he had, but watching the world fade to black before his eyes proved that some French aurors must not have liked him killing one of theirs.

Is this what it feels like to... ..

-o\O/o-

Malfoy sat in the auror ready room and waited for the triumphant return of his... no, he couldn't stand to listen to that rubbish even in

his own head. Besides, he already received that message about a trap with dozens of French aurors appearing without warning. Malfoy couldn't wait to see how Cornelius tries to pin the blame on Amelia this time. They were her aurors, weren't they? Wasn't it her job to ensure their training and abilities were up to snuff? Never mind that dear Cornelius has been cutting back the DMLE budget every year like clockwork on Malfoy's assurances that a peaceful society like theirs doesn't need any more aurors on the payroll than is absolutely necessary. Would such a peaceful and law abiding group as the Old Pureblood families would never stray into impropriety? Surely not. Only those outsider vermin, the mudbloods and their halfblood offspring ever really require policing. Why, just ask anyone on the Wizengamot, any of the right sort anyway, and they'll tell you the same in as many words.

A transparent, luminous robin flew up to Lucius's ear and whispered a message before disappearing.

The inner circle Death Eater grinned savagely and cast a patronus messenger of his own.

Of course the situation was hopeless. Malfoy knew only too well how capable continental aurors could be. Why else would Voldemort curse the Defense class position... why else would Severus Snape intentionally handicap all non-Slytherin students if not to weaken an entire nation of magicals and make England so much easier to overwhelm? Children from the proper Ancient and Noble Houses would still be privately tutored, of course, so only the lesser sort would truly fall into the abyss of ignorance.

Of course the French knew how to lay a trap. Voldemort picked England as his target country for more than sentimental reasons. England may remember Gellert Grindelwald in history classes, but the rest of Europe remembered him in their own scars and nightmares. The continent didn't want another Dark Lord smart enough to align with a muggle dictator and they spent great sums of gold maintaining some measure of vigilance to that end.

But to find out where the mudblood and her French minders actually were today? Today was already a victory for the Dark Lord and this next move would only improve upon his victory if it worked. Snape was oft seen describing Albus Dumbledore's obsession with Granger and the littlest Delacour girl to their Lord and not once has

Snape been punished for returning to the subject too often. If this next attack manages to retrieve one or two of Dumbledore's 'chess pieces', then so much the better.

Lucius turned to the doors and exit hallway. It would be better if he were near Fudge should the man need help either setting up a trial or placing blame. Hopefully both.

-o\O/o-

Spectral tears were pouring down the cheeks of Jeanne d'Arc. She understood; finally understood why she was who she was.

"Ohhhhhhhhh, you just don't understand!" Jeanne looked up at the ghost right in front of her. "Well, I suppose you might, Harry, in a way."

For a moment, Jeanne raised her hands to the heavens and looked into the sky as though she were about to bypass the mortal world and speak directly to God, but her hands and eyes returned to Earth. They were more grounded now than perhaps they'd ever been.

"When I was... maybe around ten or so years old... little older than this wonderful child beside me, I noticed that things would happen around me. They were little things, but they were strange just the same. The wash would be clean before I got to it. Our fire would light when no one was in the house. I... I heard voices even before I was visited by the Blessed Saints though I knew not of what they spoke. I was a simple farm girl and knew nothing of the Dauphin's troubles nor of the slow but sure English advance upon land I called home.

"I was scared... I knew nothing of magic as you know it... I found peace the only way a simple peasant could. I went to church. Our priest taught me to see the devil in what you called accidental magic. As I feared for my eternal soul, I devoted myself to my family and to my God until there was nothing else in my life.

"Now that I look back... I think I actually remember a man, a wizard, coming to our house. He seemed a very learned man and he offered to take me from my home to teach me my letters and numbers and other wonderful things, but then he did something... I think he used magic in the house and in front of us all. Again, I was scared. I

yelled and screamed and demanded that his demon tainted presence leave. Mother and Father were soon beside me in turning this man away. Once again I consumed myself with prayers and chores. Soon, the man was but a distant memory of temptation, one that I had succeeded in rejecting.

"Beginning one day in the year of Our Lord Fourteen hundred and twenty-four, I was visited by Saints... by the Archangel Michael, by Saint Catherine and Saint Margaret as well. They gave my life meaning, a new purpose greater than that of a peasant's life on the farm and in the kitchens. I was to help France repel the English and restore proper French rule. I listened to Saint Michael and did as I was told for who could refuse the commander of God's Army?.

"When I began to succeed far beyond anyone's expectations, I knew that I was indeed living the life God intended for me. I was so pleased by this that I completely ignored any little things that could have been expressions of magic. I gained favor with people who should not have listened to a mere peasant girl. I rode and fought with true knights who were trained in the arts of battle and I did not falter. I took wounds in battle that should have killed me outright.

"Were Catherine and Margaret witches? Did they show me a future divined by sorcery and spells? Do you even realize that the people I fought and died for... the good people of France would still have burned me at the stake had you told them the truth about me?"

Harry considered Jeanne's crisis of faith, but he's no great theologian and he's no psychologist either. In the end, it took an angel to once more bring peace to Jeanne's soul.

"Couldn't they be Saints and witches too? Michael was still an angel, wasn't he? They told you to save France and you did. France loves you. Church people loved you enough to make you a Saint like those ladies. I love you. Can we go in the church now?"

Jeanne smiled through her tears.

"Yes, please."

A dog started barking in the background. Harry was about to open his mouth to say 'ladies first' when someone else caught their attention.

"Protego maximus!" "Reducto! Reducto! Lacero!" Ex-auror Tonks and Apolline could both be heard yelling from the church courtyard.

"Gabrielle! Harry! Get in the church!"

Harry turned to see Fleur, Segolene and Hermione sprint through open ground into the church and away from what seemed like three almost invisible opponents. Sirius and Remus could both be seen further away tossing curses into the sky after another mostly hidden target. When a sickly green bolt of magical energy shot down to land at Remus's feet, Harry knew this was another Bern.

"Gabby! Take Jeanne into the church and stay with your sister. Jeanne? Please protect Gabby."

Both girls saw the attack magic now flying freely between trees and the sky and the ground. The few locals that had pierced Alain's notice-me-not spells and stopped to stare at the odd lights learned to run quickly when one of their number fell to the ground in a fountain of blood and intestines. Jeanne may have only heard about how Harry went 'inside' once, but she was a quick study and knew how to act in the face of danger. Seeing the little girl with her arms spread wide, Jeanne went inside Gabby and prayed for her to sprint all out to the church doors almost before Harry was done talking.

Even as Gabby turned to run, two curses bore down on the little girl from further afield. A bright red one, possibly a stunner of some sort, splashed across her forehead and augured into the grass nearby. A brownish-yellow beam which by all rights should have removed a massive chunk of her rib cage simply bounced off the girl and struck the stone pavers before her. Gabby screamed like the girl she was and started run.

What to do? Harry watched as the three figures heading for the church were momentarily caught in a crossfire between the girls inside and the women outside. The sound of a man yelling in pain made the ghost turn again to the air-to-ground duel. Remus was on the ground, bleeding heavily.

Harry went with his instincts. There was something in the air that was hard to see and needed to be caught. He could do that. Soon,

the world around him blurred, his spirit shooting forward like an arrow at the patch of sky trading curses with Harry's godfather below.

Sirius threw two more red bolts of magic into the air before Harry saw a purple light go the other way. He dare not look down, not when he could finally see his target. Harry pushed harder for a bit more speed.

"Ouff!"

Harry's attack wasn't in any way painful, but it did completely shake the disillusioned man, breaking his concentration on just about everything he was doing at the time. Caught out in the open and nearly falling off his own broom, the man in British auror's robes was finally tagged in the chest by a hex from Sirius and fell fifteen meters head first. Harry didn't think the man would be getting back up from that considering the audible crunch heard when he hit the ground. Harry and Sirius both turned and made for the now heavily contested church entrance. It seemed that the attackers were unwilling to blindly apparate into the church mid combat... that or the prayer wards wouldn't allow it.

Dozens of POP's were heard throughout the courtyard and for a block in either direction.

Harry twisted his form without slowing down to see that a large number of French aurors were now arriving on the scene. Thank Merlin!

The three remaining attackers must have noticed the aurors arrive too, because each of them tossed something into the church right before portkeying away.

"Gabrielle? 'Mione?" Harry slammed into the prayer ward barrier.

"Harry!" Gabby was a tightly coiled ball of terror, only being able to function at all due to the female ghost constantly watching over her. Harry took a moment to register the fact that Jeanne was holding one of the church's taller candelabras as though it were a staff or pike or something. She must be able to hold things like Peeves. Good to know. "Where are you, Harry?"

"Don't move, Angel. Let the grown-ups come get you. Please?" Harry could hear people coming up behind him.

"Harry!" Gabby didn't care about the grown-ups; she wanted her Harry. With that desperate thought, she got up and made a run for Harry. Not knowing what else to do, Jeanne followed behind her.

"Wait!"

The church wasn't safe to move around in yet and Harry knew it, but his warning went unheeded. Other voices now copied Harry's in calling for the scared girl to stop and hold still, but she ignored them too. Only a few paces from the door, something on the stone floor moved when Gabby stepped near it. A magical trap of some sort.

"Nooooo!" Harry could only scream out when he saw the metal chain leap off of the floor and wrap itself around Gabby's leg. A moment later, the little girl was gone. A portkey.

As others around him began to scream and yell in reaction to Gabby's sudden disappearance, Harry turned inwards to his link with Angel. She was beyond terrified now and seemed to be halfway through a portkey journey. He couldn't tell where she was going or what wards she'd find herself behind once she got there. He had to act fast.

French aurors were at the front step, almost ready to sift through the church and free the other witches inside from whatever traps their assailants may have left behind.

They couldn't help. They couldn't follow him to England... and that was the likely destination, wasn't it?

"Harry! Where did Gabrielle go?" Jeanne shouted into his ear. Harry noted in the back of his mind that the prayer wards must be a one-way kind of thing to let her out like that.

Jeanne! Jeanne was a ghost, like him... she could hold things which meant she could fight. Right now Jeanne was also frantic that the angel she met just today disappeared at the end of a fight she did not understand.

"Jeanne. Please say you'll help me get her back."

"Where is she?"

"England, maybe. She could also have gone to Scotland."

Jeanne's eyes narrowed dangerously. Other people were calling to the two ghosts, but all else was ignored as insignificant. They both wanted Gabrielle and wanted her now.

"How do we get there?"

Harry vowed to apologize later. "Like this."

The Welsh ghost crossed the last half meter to his French counterpart and slid into the same space she occupied. He braced himself against the unnatural feeling of being inside another ghost and willed them both 'inside'.

Within the magical tempest of portkey travel, a terrified little angel found her heart and hope return to her. She also found something else... a sense of purpose that felt so old and so very, very strong.

End Chapter

Chapter Eleven: Angels Saints and Englishmen

"Stupefy!"

Red magical light washed over Gabrielle's back as she stumbled over a dirt floor.

"Oi! We got one!" A man called out. "What a little thing you are... bloody half-breed. That'll teach you to corrupt British youth to your sick ways."

Heavy footfalls began to jog away from the dazed but conscious little girl.

She didn't curl into a ball and cry like any other nine year old girl would. If she were genuinely alone, then she would have panicked and done just that, but she was not alone. Behind two eyelids, three souls conspired to escape wherever it was that they now found themselves.

Gabby opened her eyes and looked around. She was in a small, dark and dirty room with stone walls. There was a heavy wood door on one wall which had a small opening- no doubt that was where the guard hexed her from.

While the little witch was used to feeling Harry's presence within her, this didn't mean that they could actually talk to each other. She could feel whatever emotion he pushed at her... even his desires if they were strong enough, but not his actual thoughts. This time, she could feel Jeanne too. Weird. At least they wanted the same thing from her.

Gabby sat in the middle of the floor and waited.

For the briefest of moments, Harry Potter appeared near the door and looked through its opening. Satisfied with what he saw and with the fact that he could leave Gabby to see it in the first place... Harry disappeared again.

Deep inside the alert nine year old Veela's body, two spirits worked out how to speak to each other. The process lacked any of the otherworldly feel of a dreamscape, but thoughts could be passed back and forth easily enough.

~The guard didn't bother to look for Gabrielle's wand. We can get out of here!~

~And just where is here? And is our angel well trained in using her wand?~

~Err, I'm not sure yet and only a little bit... ~

~And the adults that took her? They are trained in magic? They would know how to use it better than her, yes?~

~And being in a cell of some sort means that we would have to get past just about every wizard and witch here. I see your point. Best to let them show us around a bit and maybe get at least a few rooms closer to the way out before we try anything.~

~Yes.~

Outside, Gabby felt the urge to pull her Harry wand free from her neck and slip it into one of her knee-high socks. If she was lucky, her captors wouldn't think to check under her skirt for a wand.

~And if this is either the Ministry of Magic or Azkaban prison, then they might have dementors around. Filthy buggers.~

~What are 'dementors'?~

~Very dark creatures that take away all your happy thoughts. If you let them get too close, they can actually take your soul.~

~Demons? You English work openly with demons?~

~Not me! If it were up to me, those things would be banished to the furthest pits of Hell. But... the British Ministry of Magic does use them as prison guards.~

~Why am I not surprised? All the more reason to free our angel from this place.~

~Right.~

Gabrielle began to feel another urge. The silver-blond tressed witch got onto her knees, pulled her hands together and began to pray. It wasn't something she did very often outside of a church but then having a Catholic Saint in her head was having an effect on the girl.

~Say, Jeanne.~

~Yes, Harry?~

~How did you pick up that candelabra in the church?~

-o\O/o-

"The little Veela girl has been taken. Fudge ordered her brought to trial as soon as possible. I've been instructed to block general access to Courtroom Seven until further notice." After Auror Shackbolt's voice faded away, the glowing silvery light of a lynx patronus faded away to nothing.

Albus Dumbledore slid further back into his chair and ran his hand across the parchments on the desk before him. His hand settled over a worn notebook with a feminine script on the cover. Picking up the handwritten journal, Albus began flipping through the latter third looking for a particular page. Without looking up from precise rows of instructions, the aged headmaster raised his wand aloft and began practicing.

A sad... almost pleading line of birdsong filled the room.

"We've been over this many times, my friend. I find these spells as odious as you do but I cannot step aside and do nothing..."

His friend, Fawkes in point of fact, replied with a sharp chirp as if to say 'yes, yes, we have been over this too many times.'

"Miss Delacour is my one hope, my single light in the darkness. If she should stray from the proper path... even if only once... then I fear she will fall just as young Harry did."

A cold trill was his only answer. It may have been Albus's imagination, but Fawkes seemed to disagree with his idea of who strayed from the path and when. Albus snapped the journal shut and set it down on the corner of his desk.

"I hope you don't mind a little trip to my Wizengamot office."

Fawkes nearly cried.

"I am sorry, Fawkes. Most of the building does feel of darker deeds committed in the name of self promotion, avarice and elitism and I know you detest all of that. Luckily, we need only stay long enough to secretly observe where we are not invited and act when the time is right."

Dumbledore's phoenix companion replied in warm and relaxing tones though a note of unease was everpresent. Heavy with the burden of the Greater Good, Albus Dumbledore reached a hand out to his familiar. Fawkes spread his wings wide and leapt from his golden perch in answer.

-o\O/o-

scratch... scratch... scratch...

Harry was drawing lines in the filth and grime of Gabby's cell floor. For the briefest of moments, he fantasized about bringing his hand up to his face and finding it dirty. Jeanne was a smart girl and a good teacher, but it would take a miracle to show him how to get dirty and stay that way.

Footsteps once more approached the door from outside. Gabby looked up from her own dirt picture to see Harry vanish from sight just as the door rattled open.

Three imposing aurors with wands drawn peered down into Gabby's crystal blue eyes.

"You're getting soft, White. She'd still be nappin' had you done a proper job."

"Shut it, Travers." 'White' stepped into the room and put one rough hand on Gabrielle's shoulder. "You're coming with us. If you try to get away, you'll get much more than a spanking; I guarantee you that."

Gabby didn't say anything but she also didn't resist when Davis pulled her upright and pushed her through the door. Not yet. Any one of these men could easily crush her arm long before she got her wand into casting position... assuming she had any idea of what to cast or how to cast it. While she's had many more lessons with Misses McGonagall, Gabby didn't see how Ignis Candesco or Wingardium Leviosa were going to win a fight.

If White or his fellow aurors noticed Gabby looking attentively down each hall they traversed and every open door they passed, they didn't mention it. She was as tiny as a fairy and just about as intimidating... so why bother?

~See anything that stands out to you, Jeanne?~

~Unfortunately not. This place is a maze. Let us hope there is another door out of where ever they're taking us.~

Before Harry could make any observations of his own, their host was pushed through one last door and into a rather large circular meeting chamber. Gabby twisted her head one way and then the other to get a good look. All around her in every direction she could see tiers of wooden benches, even the lowest of which was well out of reach. There was a podium of sorts opposite her entry door, one that was surrounded by more official looking seating. Sadly, there was only one door to the open floor she now stood in... one door and one chair.

"Sit!" The as yet unnamed auror barked into Gabby's ear. Her eyebrows creased; she was an angel, not a dog!

~Calm down, Gabby. We can't go sprouting wings in here. There's no telling what these people would do to you if they knew you could do that.~

She nodded hesitantly to the guard and sat in what could only be a rather nasty looking chair with black iron wrist and leg restraints that looked comically large to her. Her shoes didn't even touch the floor. One of the other guards... Travers?... closed an iron cuff over Gabby's left arm. Then he opened it again. Closed. Open. Closed-open.

With an amused chortle, the auror left Gabby's arms and legs free and stepped away. He must have thought it funny to see her hands completely disappear inside the iron restraints. Bloody things were useless on children. Two ghosts silently thanked God that the aurors saw Gabby as completely harmless, otherwise they may have spelled some ropes or chains around her.

One of the aurors was staring at her. White? Gabby stuck her tongue out at him. Without pause White returned the favor.

"And there she is, Minister. Not quite what we were hoping to get, but a victory for light wizardry and the Ministry just the same." Gabby turned her head to the podium and special seating directly in front of her chair.

Four people, two of whom she remembered clearly from the night of the Third Task, began to sit down around the podium. One of them stepped directly behind the podium. That was one she remembered, a man who looked older than Poppa but not as old as Headmaster Dumbledore. She also remembered seeing the ugly toad of a woman appeared directly to his right. A stern but respectable looking woman Gabby didn't recognize moved to his left. Another man with slicked back light blonde hair and a snooty look to him stepped a few seats off to one side.

"Yes, yes, Lucius. She doesn't look very evil from up here though. Are you quite certain she's as dangerous as she's made out to be?"

For a moment, all four grown-ups looked at Gabby. Showtime. Innocent angel face... puppydog eyes... a slight tilt of the head... her feet couldn't reach the floor so she began to kick her legs in place in a fidgety kind of way. The stern woman and the older man in the middle both looked like they bought it, but the other man was sneering at her and the ugly woman was so angry her face changed colors.

"And what is Miss Delacour being accused of, Minister? Mister Potter was similarly blasted in the press about two years ago if I am not mistaken and he was four years older than the young lady in front of us." The stern witch was clearly not happy to see Gabby here.

That didn't excuse her horrible mistake though.

"Three! He was three years older than I am now back then! I just turned nine today and Harry was twelve when the papers were being mean to him and lying to everyone. That's three years." Gabby noticed she was glaring but she couldn't help it. "They were mean again to him last November too."

The stern witch looked like she wanted to say something and the old man looked about to laugh, but the ugly one was all purple.

"Filthy beasts like you have no place speaking to your betters!" The woman went from glaring daggers at Gabby to being properly respectful of her superior in record time. "But we aren't here to accuse a witch of criminal acts, Minister. We are here to dispose of a dangerous magical creature."

The not-ugly witch looked shocked at her ugly companion's remark, but she was cut off by Mister Minister.

"That requires her to be dangerous, Delores. While I'm sure we can get something useful out of our neighbors across the Channel if we keep Miss Delacour in protective custody, I just don't see what's so dangerous about her that requires such violence."

The man to the side, Gabby seemed to think his name was Malfoy for some reason, seemed unhappy with Mister Minister's words.

"Perhaps I can help clear matters up?" Malfoy stood up. "Rumor has it that she carry's Harry Potter's wand with her when her parents allow it. Surely, she would have it on her on her Birthday?"

Mister Minister began to speak as Malfoy seemed to fiddle with the top of his cane. "I don't see a gold chain around he-"

"Accio wand!" Malfoy cast.

There was a tugging sensation near Gabby's foot and then the hem of her skirt jumped up as a wand on a golden chain shot out of its hiding place.

~Shite! We need that!~

~Wait! We could still get it back and these fools aren't nearly as worried about security as the courts that imprisoned me.~

~Right. You're right, Jeanne. I should have known they'd check Gabby for weapons eventually. They should have done that right off anyway.~

Gabby made a great show of pouting but was able to avoid looking angry.

"You see? She had a wand!" Ugly Delores one was looking both justified and angry at the same time now. "Who's to say how many of the aurors we lost today fell to this very wand?"

"A simple thing to check-" The stern witch was cut off mid sentence.

"But this is Harry Potter's wand... a historical artifact that she and her family withheld from the Ministry despite repeated requests to return it to its rightful owners." Malfoy began to turn the wand between his fingers, inspecting the golden facet that held it on the chain.

Now Gabby was angry. That man was playing with her Harry wand. He said it wasn't hers!

"You give that back or you'll be sorry!" Gabby's anger was hard to suppress. Harry and Jeanne also didn't like Malfoy playing with Gabby's wand.

"And now the filthy little beast shows her fangs!" Gabby didn't hate many people, but Delores was one of those privileged few now. "That's a direct threat on the Minister for Magic's life! Shall I call in Macnair, Cornelius?"

As Gabby's pulse began to race, Mister Minister gave a half-hearted nod to his underling.

Miss Delores nodded to one of the aurors behind Gabby and she heard him start to walk back to the door they came out of.

"I must protest Minister! Miss Delacour is only part-Veela and therefore not a true dark creature according to Wizengamot law. You cannot simply-"

"Are you defending an enemy of Magical Britain, Amelia?" Delores cut off the stern witch. "After your auror force's dismal performance this morning, I'm beginning to wonder where your loyalties lie."

Gabby watched the Minister for Magic look between the two women and Malfoy. Malfoy seemed to agree with Delores, though he didn't say anything.

"Amelia. I'm afraid I must ask you to leave the courtroom. Why don't you head back to your desk and carefully consider your priorities as an employee of the Ministry. We'll discuss things first thing tomorrow morning."

Gabby could tell Amelia was upset. Inside, Harry was giving Jeanne a brief summary of who's who and what was said between them. It seems the ability to pick up foreign languages doesn't work for just any ghost inside a little girl's body.

Miss Amelia stood up stiffly and left the room. Minister Fudge looked troubled but he didn't do anything. Miss Dolores openly grinned in triumph. Mister Malfoy sneered.

Time was short. Even Gabby could tell that something would have to be done soon as she could hear two people coming up behind her.

A rough looking man with a heavy single bladed ax walked around her chair preceded by a large wooden block. The wand in his off-hand seemed to be keeping the block afloat just long enough to put it down in the right spot.

"Why aren't you crying little girl?" The man, Macnair she supposed, asked. "You see this ax in my hands? I mean to take your head with it."

"You're not a very nice man."

Gabby was calm... unnaturally so, or so it seemed to the grown-ups watching. Perhaps she was in denial? In truth, two people who she trusted very, very much were willing her to keep calm. Any second now something big would happen. She knew it.

Minister fudge said something about his stomach but Gabby really wasn't paying attention. She kept glancing between the Harry wand in Mister Malfoy's fingers and the rough looking Mister Macnair.

"Come on, girl. It's time to get out of the chair and get what's commin' to you." Macnair released his magical hold on the block and put both hands on the ax handle. "Get up, or I'll have one of the aurors get you up!"

Gabby stood, but she didn't move over to the chopping block. Instead, she put herself right in front of the executioner.

"You better stop! You'll be sorry. I mean it!"

Laughter rose around her as Gabby made her stand.

"Just... just do it. I think I'm going to be sick if we stretch this out any longer." Minister Fudge said his piece.

"Yessir." Light glinted along the sharp edge of magically hardened steel as Mister Macnair brought the ax over his head. "Makes no difference to me if you go clean or not little bird. Down the middle it is!"

~Now!~

As Macnair's ax reached the very top of his swing and Delores Umbridge's smile reached full strength, two transparent blurs shot away from Gabby. The ghost of Harry Potter shot like a cannon right at Lucius Malfoy, catching him completely off guard. Of the seven British Magicals in the room, only one of them watched Jeanne appear behind Macnair as the Boy-Who-Came-Back throttled Lord Malfoy and pulled him to the floor.

Several voices cried out in alarm, but this spectral attack was so unexpected that none moved to help Lucius or even draw their wands. Macnair was about to be very sorry for his inattention.

Without warning, the Ministry's executioner felt the ax leave his grasp. In a confused panic, he looked up.

A righteously angry Jeanne d'Arc glared down at him, her fingers curled around the handle of his ax.

"W-wait I-" was all Macnair managed to get out before Jeanne whipped the ax through a tight downward arc and buried its blade in his chest.

When she was still alive, French knights did what they could to teach Jeanne how to wield all manner of weapons... including where to aim. Macnair was dead before he hit the floor.

"Gabrielle!" Harry shot back across the courtroom floor and stopped right before the Veela girl. "Here!"

Her Harry wand! He got it back!

Just as Gabby's fingers pulled tight around the smooth holly shaft, a rainbow of spellfire erupted from the three aurors still on the courtroom floor.

Though she was small, Gabby was still too close to the aurors to get out of the way and every spell was on target. Much to the shock of every grown witch and wizard present, Stupefy and Reductor curses sent Gabrielle's way seemed to bounce off or slide around her sides. Another salvo of stronger curses were deflected just as easily.

"Kill her! Keep them away from us!"

Delores's eyes could just be seen over the top of the decorative wood framework surrounding the Minister's podium. Minister Fudge was cowering behind the podium.

A pained cry went the air as Jeanne's ax found one auror's shoulder blade. If not for her instinctive dodge around his blasting hex, she would have split his heart open just like she did Macnair.

"Cast Unforgivables if you have too!"

Lucius's scowl quickly fled once he heard Delores's words. He just loved that hideous beast of a woman. Wand once more in hand, he turned to the slip of a girl who seemed to just shrug off auror level curses, not that she was catching as many as before. Of the three aurors who escorted Gabrielle into the courtroom, one was clutching his shoulder and rolling in a pool of his own blood, one was dodging

Jeanne's ax and the last auror was fighting Harry Potter's ghost for wand control.

If there was one bright point in this crisis, then it had to be that the little girl was finally acting like a little girl. She was crouched down desperately clutching her wand in both hands and crying. Lucius took careful aim. He wanted to end this.

"Avada Kedavra!"

A sickly jet of green light shot away from the Malfoy patriarch and drove straight into Gabby's left side... and then it rolled across her waist and continued on to the stone floor. Small cracks and char marks on stone were the only remaining proof that had tried anything at all.

"You bloody bastard!" Harry pulled the auror's wand free and reversed his grip as he shot across the room intent on driving his pointy prize through Malfoy's heart.

Unlike the common aurors who did not receive private tuition in the field of attack magic, Malfoy actually knew a ghost banishing charm and cast it right as Harry was about to stake him vampire style.

With a startled cry, Harry flew clear across the courtroom floor, losing his weapon in the process.

"Noooooooo!"

Seeing her savior many times over get tossed across the room by the scary looking blonde man broke Gabby free of her panic.

"LEAVE US ALONE!" She swept her wand from left to right in a wide arc, not bothering to aim or to cast a particular spell. She wanted the mean people to stop doing things to her and her friends. She wanted it badly.

A hemispherical pressure wave shot out from Gabby's Harry wand, pushing and crushing nearly everything in its path. Nearly being the operative word. While Jeanne lost her ax before she could strike again, neither ghost suffered from the attack. Instead, Gabby shredded almost half of all woodwork in the room and threw near every wizard and witch before it back several meters.

As wide as the arc of her spell was, she suffered for lack of aim. The spell missed Lucius completely.

Ropes jumped out of the man's wand and wrapped Gabrielle tight. The dark wizard finally discovered spell class would actually work on the girl... ones that don't immediately harm her. Incarcerous didn't hurt the girl, it just surrounded her with rope.

It was Harry's turn to scream as two very angry ghosts turned on the only moving target left in the room. Lucius knew he only had time to charm one of them, but which one was the bigger threat? As two see-through blurs shot at him, Lucius cast against the girl. She was killing people.

Jeanne went flying across the room just as Harry's hands connected with Malfoy's chest and threw him back into the stone tier behind him. Stars danced in the pureblood wizard's vision and a slight ringing tone filled his ears.

Music began to fill the chamber, spine-tingling and unearthly music. Harry and Jeanne both stopped what they were doing. The music rose higher and higher until, amidst a ball of flames high above the chamber floor, a phoenix appeared.

Fawkes. Sod it all.

"Jeanne! Get inside NOW!" Harry screamed at his female companion.

Soon two ghostly forms and a fiery red and gold bird were diving in a race to reach Gabby first. While the firebird had surprise and gravity working for it, ghosts felt neither gravity nor air resistance.

Lucius Malfoy pulled himself off of the floor to find the bound girl and both ghosts had somehow escaped the room. At least he was still alive unlike Macnair. But... what could he do to make the Dark Lord not torture and kill him for losing the girl? For letting her escape alive?

"Are t-they gone?" Minister Fudge's voice squeaked out from under a pile of broken boards and splinters.

So he wasn't the only one to come out of it fully conscious.

"Don't be so sure, Cornelius. How is Delores?"

As Fudge poked and prodded the woman next to him, Malfoy scanned the room. Macnair was clearly dead. The aurors were either dead or out cold. Yet another mark against Amelia's auror force.

"She's not answering but I... I think I can see her breathing."

The pile of wood above Minister Fudge shifted some before settling again.

"Lucius, my good man. I'm going to need some help to get out of here. Will you alert the aurors and healers to our predicament? I can't believe this damn room has no alarm system in case of emergencies."

Lucius stepped up to the Minister's partial tomb.

"I think, Cornelius, that there is one more task to be performed before I can call for assistance."

"Wha- what would that be? I'm bleeding down here! I think my leg is broken and I can't find my wand." Minister Fudge's breathing was quite labored now.

Lucius levitated some of the debris out of the way. Unfortunately, Fudge didn't seem too bad off. One night's rest in St. Mungo's with a buxom healer trainee or two attending to the Minister's every need would see him in good spirits come sunup. That just wouldn't do at all.

The Death Eater picked up a piece of scrap wood about the size of his own wand and transfigured it into a metal spike.

"Now Lucius... what are you doing with that? It looks quite sharp."

He couldn't risk someone else hearing any more of the Minister's words, so without further delay Lucius rammed the spike into Cornelius's heart. With barely a squeak, Cornelius Fudge died.

One Finite Incantatem later and Fudge appeared to have died when flying shrapnel from the Veela girl's massive banishing charm went between his ribs.

For the next minute or two, Malfoy schooled his features so that when he left the room he would be able to properly act the part of a stunned victim, a lucky escapee of the successful assassination of Cornelius Fudge, British Minister for Magic. Fudge was killed by Gabrielle Delacour, the half-breed Veela assassin acting on orders from the French Dark Lady Delacour... or was that Dark Lady d'Arc?

Wars had been started for less.

Wait. Didn't Potter say that other ghost's name? Joan, wasn't it? Under his carefully schooled look of shock and anger, Lucius mentally smiled. Dark Lady d'Arc it was. He even had 'proof' now.

-o\O/o-

Only minutes earlier, as Lucius was realizing that his prize had escaped, Fawkes flashed a tightly bound nine year old girl into his companion wizard's office at Hogwarts Castle.

"Ow!"

Gabby fell face first onto the stone floor. From her dust-bunny's eye view, she saw a pair of colorful slippers and the bottom of a purple robe step out of green flames.

"Welcome to Hogwarts, Miss Delacour!"

The ropes loosened and disappeared. Her Harry wand disappeared too.

"Hey!"

Gabby watched the old man quickly drop her wand into a desk drawer and close it as she pulled herself off of the floor.

"I'm afraid you are far too young to have access to such power, young lady. Do not fear, for it is safe and sound and will be waiting for you to turn eleven and start proper classwork. I do look forward to your sorting... Gryffindor, no doubt." Albus Dumbledore looked

upon Gabrielle with his best grandfatherly look and sparkly eyes. Fawkes began to preen on a golden stand off to one side.

"Merlin forbid the little half-breed set foot in my common room." An oily voice snapped.

Gabby felt a wave of cold anger spread out from her core. The name Snape appeared in her mind. She didn't like this man.

~I wouldn't mind one bit if you axed that greasy git, Jeanne. It's just a question of how long before he burns in Hell.~

~There's only two of them... maybe we can force the bird to take Gabrielle home?~

As she turned to glare angrily at the mean man behind her, Gabby felt her dress shift and change. Looking down, she saw that Headmaster Dumbledore was transfiguring her clothes into a pre-sorting Hogwarts uniform. The cold anger inside of her doubled until the little Veela was on the verge of being physically ill.

"In time, you will find that Hogwarts is the safest place for you, Miss Delacour. Your abduction from France proves th-"

~No goddamned way!~

Without consulting Jeanne, Harry rushed outside. His hands were around the Headmaster's throat almost before his form finished becoming visible. Man and ghost tumbled to the floor.

"Potter!" Snape yelled behind him.

Behind the hate filled insult that Severus made Harry's last name out to be, several portraits high above could be heard shouting in alarm.

Gabby saw motion out of the corner of her eyes and locked onto the image of Snape drawing his wand.

Jeanne came out. Gabby's fears returned as she was left once again alone in her own mind, a helpless little girl watching the living battle the dead for control of her soul.

"Ha!"

Snape sneered triumphantly as he sent Harry flying through an office wall with the same spell Malfoy used in the courtroom just a minute or two ago. So focused was he on his chance to openly hex Potter that he completely ignored the second ghost pulling something free of a wall display.

Severus Snape's single minded hatred for Potter had caused problems in the past. Too many to count, really, but letting Pettigrew escape and preventing Harry and Hermione from getting their side of the Sirius Black story out were big ones. He was doing it again, focusing on the reason for all of his troubles in life, but this time the Potions Master's laser tight focus caused him to miss something big that Dumbledore couldn't stop in time.

Fawkes squawked in alarm as a long, gleaming blade flashed down from behind Snape and neatly removed his wand arm. A bright spray of blood coated the sword's blade and painted a trail across bookshelves and furniture pieces. Jeanne slid around the room to Gabby's side, Sword of Gryffindor in hand. She wanted a better angle to run Snape through.

"Stop!" Albus jabbed his wand in Jeanne's direction causing the spirit to freeze in place. "This madness had gone quite far enough."

Harry came back into the room but Headmaster Dumbledore saw him coming. Another jab of his wand and two ghosts were locked in place before the Headmaster.

"I am delighted, of course, to see you back in the castle my boy." Albus turned his sparkling eyes to the other ghost in the room as his wand turned to the bleeding Potions Master on the floor. "You, young lady, are a very troubled spirit. Such callous disregard for human life... what had those men in the Ministry ever done to you? Could you not have simply disarmed them? No, you cannot be allowed to influence Mister Potter nor Miss Delacour any longer. You are not welcome in my school and I shall be changing the wards to keep you out when I change them to keep Mister Potter in."

Gabby's eyes darted around the room. The angry man on the floor wasn't bleeding anymore, but he still looked hurt. Harry and Jeanne were stuck in place like the old man used some kind of magic ghost glue on them. Headmaster Dumbledore turned back to her again.

"Miss Delacour. I know you are too young to understand what is going on, but you just have to trust me. Dark times are coming for the Wizarding World and we must take precautions. The Girl Who Lived is a vulnerable target in her home country; too vulnerable. Little Ariana Dumbledore, on the other hand, will be overlooked as a mere oddity here in Hogwarts Castle."

The fear and panic were returning quickly. Her saviors were prisoners now just like her. Gabby's eyes were holding far too much moisture; another blink and hot drops slid down her cheeks.

"Mommmaaaaaa..." A low moan escaped her lips.

As her body began to shake and tears fell faster, the old man in front of her looked at a book sitting on the corner of his desk nearest Gabby.

"Most unfortunate that I find myself doing this again when the first time went so horribly wrong, but there are no safe alternatives... not anymore." The Headmaster held his wand in a ready position.

"I want my Momma."

"Miss Del- no... Miss Dumbledore. I am very sorry, but you must trust me. What I do, I do for the Greater Good of all mankind. When you are older, you will appreciate the sacrifices we make today... but for now I must insist."

As the old man focused himself and brought the wand in his right hand to a new position, Gabby felt fear beat on the emotional supports that having Harry and Jeanne with her had built up before. They were trapped. This man was going to make her be someone else. He didn't stop at stealing her wand, he wanted to take her name too. Momma. Momma would save her. Momma would make the bad things go away. Momma loved her so much and Gabrielle loved Momma more than words could say.

Gabby saw the old man's mouth fall open as she surrounded herself with Momma's love.

I WANT MY MOMMA!

Change washed across her body and continued to fill the room with power. Silver trinkets and wall displays rattled and overturned. The old headmaster was forced to shield his eyes and step back. He lost his footing among the lesser artifacts tumbling across the floor and lost his wand reaching for something to steady himself. Having lost his wand, Dumbledore also lost his hold on the two ghosts suspended in mid-air.

Now that Harry was free again, he swooped down and collected the wands dropped by both wizards. Harry smiled. It was his and Jeanne's job to keep Gabby in the fight before, but now her aura of love and purity gave him hope that they would be returning to France soon. Jean relaxed her guard and turned the sword in her hands towards the Headmaster.

"Fawkes. Gabby needs to get home. Will you take her home?" Harry called to the phoenix which hadn't moved from his perch even once during the short fight which just took place.

The beautiful red and gold bird hid his head under a wing and cried out notes of sorrow and forgiveness, but didn't move. Harry and Jeanne pulled closer to the crying angel in the center of the Headmaster's office.

"Young man! Mister Potter, you'd better surrender yourselves! There is no way for you to get out of this office without going past the other Heads of House and believe me they have been warned that you and Headmaster Dumbledore are fighting up here. The Bloody Baron is on his way up here now so you better drop those wands, now!" One portrait called out from above.

"How can you sit there and watch a Headmaster kidnap a little girl!" Harry fired back. "I'm through with this man's scheming... I'd rather haunt the sewers of Paris forever than spend another second in Albus Dumbledore's presence!"

I'm going to go to Momma! I don't care if a stupid bird is taking me or not! Gabby was scared and confused and wanted her Momma and her Poppa so very badly. She wasn't going to wait for some grown-up or magical bird to do it for her. Harry. Jeanne. Come here so we can go to Momma.

Gabby held out her hands clearly showing her spirit companions what she wanted. Neither ghost seemed to have any idea of what Gabby had planned, but if you couldn't have faith in an angel then what could you have faith in? Both ghosts pulled close to the little angel, pointing their captured sword and wands out as if to ward off all manner of attack.

Albus wanted to say or do something, but he couldn't. It was taking all of his concentration to mentally fight against the powerful thrall he could feel rolling off of the transformed Veela girl. It wasn't lust or desire, it was pure love and Albus absolutely hated fighting against it.

Above her head, a magical spark ignited between raised wingtips. The wings jerked once and the spark flared, quickly building into a whirling humming ring of blue-white fire.

You are not a nice man. Gabby chirped. I don't like you and I don't want to be here anymore. I'm going to my Momma and YOU CAN'T STOP ME!

Gabby broke her staring contest with the old man and checked to see that her protectors were close by. Satisfied, she closed her eyes tight and repeated in her mind. 'I want Momma. I want Momma. I want Momma.'

Two pure white wings slowly spread and turned downward. Just as before, the tight glowing ring above her spread and moved with her wingtips, carving a sizable chunk of the office around them away from the rest of it.

Headmaster Dumbledore and his gravely wounded Potions Master both looked on in wonder as an angel's glowing, buzzing halo expanded and dropped to the floor, hacking through Hogwarts Castle's wards like they didn't exist.

-o\O/o-

Hermione pulled the handkerchief away from her face and looked across the salon again.

After the horrible attack in the middle of Domrémy-la-Pucelle, she and the others of her group were sent by emergency portkey to a series of chambers inside the French Ministry of Magic's special

crisis management annex. Apolline was grief stricken at the thought that her Little Angel disappeared by portkey... a fate that has never ended well for any Veela in living memory... and she was so young... and... and to have taken such a special girl as her Gabrielle... Apolline was in her own private hell.

To either side, Fleur and Nathalie were doing what they could to support Apolline, which mostly meant they were crying on the Veela mother's shoulders with everything they had. Gabrielle's grand-mère was also in the room, but she was verbally blasting away at a group of French Ministry officials and aurors. To hear her screaming, France had not only failed the Delacour family but also lost a national heroine, an icon of the light and of equal rights for all sentient creatures. It was all the woman could do to simply hold her Veela nature in and not kill every Ministry official in the room.

One could argue that things were far worse for Alain. Due to his position as Head of the Department of the Interior, it was his job to set aside any personal pain that losing his daughter on her ninth birthday would create and devote himself to the welfare of France's Magical citizenry. There were after action reports to compile and senior officials to update and I.C.W. protocols to adhere to and reporters to deal with and funerals to plan. There were Emergency Reserve Auror divisions to call up.

Someone took Alain's Little Angel. There would be Hell to pay.

Hermione shook herself out of her own self-recrimination to find her handkerchief missing. Someone blew their nose next to her.

"I'm sorry. I should have asked." Segolene stretched her arm out to return the cloth.

Hermione put up her best fake smile and pushed Segolene's hand back.

"You might need it again and I can always transfigure another." Segolene did look like she'd need it again, but then the situation was so bad that no female in the room seemed to be able to resist tearing up. A fair number of men in the room were openly emotional as well.

Hermione didn't hear the buzzing-humming noise at first, but to be fair no one did. She did see the small point of blue-white light flash into existence about two meters directly in front of Apolline.

"Ward breach! Wands out!" Someone yelled.

Except for the grieving Veelas, everyone nearby cleared away from the unidentified point of light rapidly building two meters above a heavily trafficked carpet. Fleur did have enough sense of the situation to draw her wand just as about thirty other magicals did the same. Nearly a dozen pistols were drawn as well.

The salon fell quiet as the point of light grew and began to descend. A long high pitched tone filled the air becoming nearly as loud as the cacophony of voices that it had just replaced. As the point of light fell lower, it clearly became a ring which, like a muggle magician's hoop, replaced empty space with something else.

"GABRIELLE!" Apolline surged against the two Veela holding her in place.

MOMMA! Gabby screeched. The halo faded at her feet and the ethereal tone faded along with it.

At that call, all movement from anyone else in the room ceased as Veela mother and angel daughter both worked free of their bonds and ran into a bone crushingly tight embrace.

"I thought I'd never see you again, Little Angel! Thank God you came back! Thank God!"

Gabby's wings wrapped around her Momma. At the motherly contact, a sharp pulse of Gabby's powerful yet innocent thrall spread throughout the room before fading into nothingness. As her thrall fell away, so to did her wings and feathery features.

"Jeanne... that's Gabby's mother Apolline. Her Aunt Nathalie is to the right and her sister Fleur to the left."

Few people aside from the select few who already knew about Gabby's special ability had even payed attention to the two ghosts and pile of random things that fell to the floor. They were too busy looking at an angel... a real, live angel... right there in front of them.

Why was she wearing Hogwarts robes?

"Harry James Potter! Where in Jeanne's name have you been for the last half-hour?" Hermione yelled from behind him.

The other shoe fell.

"Has it been that long? And really, 'Mione, you should ask Jeanne's permission before you invoke her name... she's right here, you know."

Gabrielle Delacour came back from a magical abduction... as an angel. Harry Potter came back with her, a wand in each hand and brought a pile of odds and ends... half of a pensieve and one third of a desk among them. Jeanne d'Arc came back with the other two carrying a bloody sword. The name Gryffindor could clearly be seen etched into the flat of the blade.

"Jeanne d'Arc, Hermione Granger. Hermione, this is Jeanne. Jeanne? 'Mione is really good with a library. 'Mione? Jeanne's really good with an ax. Would someone please tell Alain Delacour that his daughter is back in France and safe from harm? I don't see him in the room."

Harry's last statement seemed to break the room-wide tableau and got many spellbound witnesses moving again. The volume in the room rose from pin-drop to mass-hysteria in about ten seconds.

As people once more began to yell into his ears, Harry sought what escape he could by going over things in his own mind. Gabby's wand was taken. Harry could balance that against the two wands he held in his ghostly grip. If Albus Dumbledore wanted his wand back, then he'd better be willing to trade. In the mean time, Gabby could try using the Headmaster's wand instead. Harry resisted the urge to snap Snape's wand outright. Maybe Alain would like to hold onto it or something. A decent portion of Albus Dumbledore's desk in Hogwarts lay on the ground. Sadly, they did not get the part of the desk he remembered Headmaster Dumbledore sliding Gabby's wand into.

Hang on... what's that?

On the floor, Harry noticed a notebook of some sort that looked much more muggle than anything else in the pile. He picked it up and read the hand written title.

Lily Potter

September 1979 -

His mother wrote that. The last journal Dumbledore handed over was brilliant, but it only showed him a small slice of his mother's early school years. The words 'James Potter' didn't even make it into that one. This one was different, Harry could hardly-

"Harry, please!" Alain yelled from behind the ghost. "Gabrielle isn't done crying and Jeanne, God bless her, doesn't know anything about the magical world and she's not making sense."

Harry turned around. A lot of people were staring at him. A lot of people were staring at Gabrielle and Jeanne as well, but those stares were more worshipful and less demanding. He got all the demanding ones.

Harry lowered the journal and started listening to Alain's questions. He didn't let go of it, oh no. The crisis would be solved eventually. Harry just had to be patient and then he could read his mother's last journal in peace and quiet... with Hermione reading right along with him.

"Well... how much did they tell you about our afternoon church visit?"

-o\O/o-

Le Mystique

19 august 1995

ANGELS SAINTS AND ENGLISHMEN

Violence and bloodshed erupted in Northern France yesterday when British Ministry of Magic aurors portkeyed into both Bayeux and Domrémy-la-Pucelle in what appears to be a kidnapping-

assassination plot orchestrated by the very highest levels of British magical government.

French aurors reacted quickly to an initial attack in the heart of Bayeux. Department of the Interior spokespersons revealed that the family of an un-named upper level French Ministry of Magic official was first taken hostage and then later murdered when anti-portkey and anti-apparation wards were raised by French aurors to restrict avenues of escape. While final numbers are being withheld, both British and French forces suffered casualties in an engagement which is said to have lasted less than one half hour from start to finish.

A second violent action erupted in the town of Domrémy-la-Pucelle only minutes after the last shot was fired in Bayeux. A second group of English attackers surprised and attacked the family of Monsieur Alain Delacour, the well known Ministry official whose daughters are Beauxbatons Triwizard Champion Fleur(18) and the Girl-Who-Lived Gabrielle(9). Famous British expatriates Harry Potter(d14) and Hermione Granger(15) were with the Delacours at the time of the attack and fought desperately against their own countrymen to defend both themselves and the Delacours.

Preliminary reports indicate that this aggression is solely the work of Britain's magical government and that their non-magical neighbors appear innocent of wrongdoing. Furthermore, there is ample evidence that Fudge's administration see's non-Magical England as a country separate from their own. Worse yet, common English subjects are not accorded international protections from their magical cousins due to I.C.W. policies on national sovereignty. Even though Lord Sirius Black was cleared of any wrongdoing by an I.C.W. panel almost one month ago to the day, the Fudge administration continues to blame Black for a grisly string of crimes which has killed as many as sixty English subjects and harmed nearly one hundred others. Emergency meetings in Paris and at I.C.W. offices are underway even now as the Wizarding population of continental Europe reacts to English aggression.

Not since march 1942 when the RAF bombed Boulogne-Billancourt has France been so surprised by an unjust attack from English forces as they were yesterday. This time, no Germans were involved.

If this was the end of the story, then France would still find itself in an international crisis which could lead to open magical warfare on a scale which has not been seen since Dark Lord Grindelwald's rise to power half a century ago. In a shocking turn of events, the ghost of Jeanne d'Arc gave aid to Potter when he followed the Girl-Who-Lived to England after she ran afoul of a portkey trap (see Battle of Courtroom Seven, page 3). Saint Jeanne and Potter then followed Gabrielle Delacour after she was abducted yet again and taken to Hogwarts Castle in Scotland. In a second violent encounter (see Rescue from Hogwarts, page 3), Saint Jeanne and Potter fought against Headmaster Dumbledore and Potions Master Severus Snape. Before their escape, Dumbledore took Delacour's wand and Potter took Dumbledore's and Snape's wands. Saint Jeanne returned with the fabled Sword of Gryffindor in her hands.

How did a nine year old girl and two ghosts manage to escape their second imprisonment and return to France only an hour after the initial portkey wrapped itself around Delacour's ankle?

Gabrielle Marion Delacour, the famous Veela Girl-Who-Lived, who just turned nine years old on the day of the attacks, is an Angel. Consider the following evidence as reported from her dramatic return to France. First: In her transformed state, she has a full covering of pure white feathers which is unlike the natural Veela featherless form. Second: She released a magical thrall which many witnesses described as feeling 'loving', 'peaceful', 'innocent' and even 'divine'. Veela thrall creates feelings of desire or devotion. Third: Veela use their natural fire talents to attack enemies with balls of wandless magical fire. Gabrielle used her halo as magical transport to carry her and two ghost companions through two advanced ward schemes and across 1000km in mere seconds to land at her mother's feet deep within a French Ministry of Magic annex in Paris.

This is no joke. Gabrielle Delacour is an Angel. Saint Jeanne publicly declared Delacour to be an Angel with her appearance, aura, halo and speech closely matching Archangel Michael, the very being who commanded Jeanne to fight the English almost six hundred years ago.

Citizens of France, we at The Mystic ask you. Is war coming? Can it be avoided? Will Jeanne d'Arc once more fight for France, this time

at the behest of the Angel Gabrielle? Please write in to the Paris office of The Mystic with your opinion.

-o\O/o-

Cedric Diggory dropped his teacup. Shards of porcelain and small rivers of steaming tea bounced off of his shoes and across the stained wood floor in the study of his family home, but he paid the mess no mind. There were two newspapers in front of him this morning; each of them demanding his full attention and neither one agreeing on anything of substance apart from the fact that Very Bad Things happened yesterday. The Daily Prophet and Le Mystique (English language version) both claimed these Very Bad Things involved Harry and the Delacours... and the British Ministry of Magic building, but the How, the Why and the End Result were all very much at odds with each other.

In opposition to the French Headline 'Angels Saints and Englishmen', the Prophet had 'French Veela Assassinates Fudge'. 'Battle of Courtroom Seven' was countered by 'Malfoy's Heroic Stand'. 'Rescue from Hogwarts' had no answer, but then the French had no piece running counter to 'Dark Creatures Influence Muggleborns'. The English Triwizard Survivor didn't want to believe either of those last two articles, but he did have to consider the source. One was to be trusted. One was not.

Cedric stared at the two papers in sheer disbelief before he reached out for a clean piece of parchment and a quill. Fleur had to know what the Prophet was saying about her family. She had to know that he didn't believe the Prophet at all, that he held her family in the highest regard... that the stories did nothing to change the way he felt about her. He asked after her sister and her family. He almost asked if there was anything he could do for her but held back at the last minute. Would there already be interdiction wards for international owl post at the border? Instead, he ended the letter with words of love, attached his copy of the Prophet to the letter and sent the parcel on it's way via family owl. After a few moments of indecision, Cedric gave up on burning his copy of Le Mystique in favor of looking for a good hiding spot with space enough for several newspapers. He still had a subscription after all.

End Chapter

Chapter Twelve: The Messenger

In the church Saint Remy, two ghosts knelt before a statue.

"Saint Margaret."

"Hmm?" Harry looked up.

"This is a statue of Saint Margaret. I would pray here often... before..." Jeanne looked a little uncomfortable but she continued. "It's different than what I remember but not by too much. I suppose we are lucky the Germans didn't grind this church into dust like so many others."

"Well I'm glad Saint Margaret is still here for you."

Harry looked around. Not that he was an expert on Jeanne's childhood church or anything, but the whole thing looked old to him. Six pews away, he spied the Delacour extended family. To his other side, Sirius distracted reporters while Remus and a few aurors prevented anyone else from passing through the portal doors.

"You don't... feel... different at all, do you?"

Jeanne broke from her prayers to drift towards the main altar.

"No, Harry. I am not being called to the Lord as far as I can tell and Gabrielle is the only angel I see right now."

Harry suppressed his urge to laugh and really thought about it. When Gabby learns notice-me-not's and the Disillusionment Charm, she would be able to 'appear' to chosen targets, wouldn't she? Maybe seeing an angel when no-one else can isn't a laughing matter.

"Thank you anyway." Jeanne turned briefly to Harry and smiled before continuing to inspect the stained glass windows. "You gave me something I have desperately wanted ever since I died. This is no small feat."

"And you helped me defend Gabby when she needed me... us. She needed us. No one else could have followed her the way we did and I couldn't have saved her without you."

"Did she really need us, though? It was her God given powers which saw us safely from that old man's office to her mother's side."

Harry chose to ignore the distinction between magic and divine power for now. Now that Jeanne was on friendly terms with him and the Delacours, Harry didn't want to mess things up again. Besides, isn't all magic 'god given' anyway?

"It was a power she didn't know she had until she used it."

"And every prayer I have recited since our return has been for Gabrielle to be blessed with the knowledge she needs to wield her powers righteously."

"And here I am wasting all of my prayers on my fellow Englishmen, hoping they will realize what a stupid thing it is they are doing."

Jeanne smiled. "Maybe if you pray hard enough, God will turn the hearts of your people. Miracles do happen."

Two ghosts spent the rest of the morning praying and discussing how much better England and France are doing now than in centuries previous... if you ignored the recent magical crisis.

While continental I.C.W. countries were scrambling to seal their North Atlantic borders, other international powers were also at work. After all, in certain circles the news that a world famous Catholic Saint and an Angel both existed and actually talked to people was just breaking. Pope John Paul II may not be a magical person, but squibs and wizards were well entrenched in the Vatican and knew His Holiness would want to meet both Saint Jeanne and the Angel Gabrielle as soon as it could be arranged.

Eventually two ghosts, their close friends and family left the warm little church behind for Paris and the much larger cathedral of Notre Dame and a very important appointment.

-o\O/o-

"Squawk!" Fawkes barked in displeasure once before raising his wings and flashing out of the Headmaster's office.

"...same to you..." A very dour Severus Snape muttered in the direction of the bird that had once again fled his very presence.

Albus sighed heavily as he sat down in the chair behind his new desk.

"I am sorry Severus... Fawkes has been much more difficult to reason with since our little incident."

Professor Snape snorted in derision, subconsciously grasping at his right arm. The very arm which is a dark construct, a creation of the Dark Lord's to ensure that his Potions Master could maintain his exceedingly high level of ability in potions brewing.

Voldemort knew, of course, that Dumbledore knew how Snape came by his new arm. It was a testament to how much value each man placed in the Head of Slytherin House that he could pass freely between their two most heavily defended bastions without assistance or even advance warning. So valued was he that Albus knew he was going to lose the next discussion even before he started it.

"Sixty points, Severus? Not one of the houses have even had a chance to earn points so it amazes me how you can find so many points to remove from Gryffindor on their very first night back in the castle... and I do believe that the hexed Hufflepuff... their star chaser if I recall correctly... was surrounded by Slytherins at the time."

"I can't be bothered to keep up with the comings and goings of the Weasley twins, Headmaster. It was one of their pranks- one that's been used on my snakes on many occasions- that took the idiot boy down. I find no proof of Slytherin wrongdoing in that."

"Our new Gryffindor Head of House begs to differ. Professor Mason was good enough to keep silent in front of the children but he is protesting your punishments just the same."

Severus glared into the light stain of the Headmaster's new desk and remembered how the old one came to be replaced. "Then impress upon him the way things are, Headmaster, for I will not

allow discipline to lessen just because some fool wants to coddle his little brats. They get what they deserve..."

"But do you give them what they deserve, Severus?"

"I give them the truth!" The Slytherin Head of House nearly yelled at his superior. "The Ministry is biased, the shopkeepers are prejudiced, the world outside of Hogwarts is not fair. Not in the least. Those born into pureblood families know this from birth... it is the half-bloods and muggleborns which need to learn when to submit and when to escape before they leave Hogwarts."

Albus remained silent. Until the world could be changed for the better... without bloodshed... this was the way of things as he understood them too. The old Headmaster may want to do away with pureblood society but he was unwilling to be aggressively violent for any cause. Did that path not lead to Gellert Grindelwald?

"What were you going to tell Granger, Albus? What were you going to tell her when she proudly displayed her N.E.W.T. results - which would no doubt be straight O's – only to find that it meant nothing to anyone of note? When were you going to tell her that the only way she would ever be accorded any place in British Wizarding society was after she spread her legs for the right pureblood?"

"I had hoped that she would take a fancy to young Mister Weasley... add some fresh blood to their line..."

"Weasley? You were going to match Little Miss Know-It-All to Ronald Weasley?" Severus took a moment to snort. "Headmaster, I didn't know you hated her more than I did."

"I am quite fond of Miss Granger... bright as they come and headstrong enough to take Molly head on... but it is getting late and we have other topics to discuss, do we not?" Albus drew a wand and gestured to Snape's gloved right 'hand'. "How is your new arm coming along?"

Severus grasped his right arm once again.

"My control is improving, but it is troublesome to get a feel for things." There was one silver lining to this cloud. "This cycle's wolfsbane is a lost cause."

"It is a pity, but it is a small setback compared to others... tell me, was Delores Malfoy's pick or was she a holdover from Fudge?" Albus took a lemon drop from his ever present candy bowl.

Severus relaxed his posture and settled more into the chair. "Lucius is quite happy with her. She's pathetic really but she's about the strongest supporter of the pureblood cause you'll ever find. Interim Minister Malfoy was delighted to have her on his side and even more so to get her into Hogwarts and out of his office. The woman seemed to think her ideas were actually worth something."

"It is a sad day for Hogwarts. The woman has no real qualifications to speak of." If Albus noticed Severus roll his eyes, he made no mention of it.

"Of course she's not really here to teach."

"Of course."

"Now that you are persona non grata in Bern, Malfoy can see your influence falling. He's looking for a way to strip you of your Chief Warlock title and the Board of Governors is only two votes away from getting you out of the school." Severus knew that Dumbledore understood all of that already. The next bit was only supposition until now. "Delightful Delores will be doing her very best to catch you doing something in opposition to the Ministry and failing that... she might just make something up."

"I suppose at least that I am lucky they aren't using French newspaper stories against me in public."

Albus's gaze passed over a display stand that was still damaged. He rather liked looking at his cross sectioned pensieve and the half-books beneath.

"I was there and I still don't believe what happened. Even so, Skeeter's quill will harm you more than anything you can do yourself."

"Yes, yes... they wouldn't want to admit their dark assassin is an angel- a creature of purity and light even more so than Fawkes. That

is something that Malfoy cannot even allow the least rumor of whether he believes it or not. Does he? Believe it?"

"He accused me of drinking. The Dark Lord was less skeptical."

Albus had another lemon drop near his open mouth, but chose to go without for the moment. "And is Voldemort interested in young Gabrielle?"

"Almost as much as you are. She is shockingly powerful, magic bounces off her and she's young enough to be easily cowed. Now that the Ministry is dancing to his tune he is ready to put more effort into the girl's capture and he will be most displeased if she escapes again. Minister or not, Lucius suffered greatly for letting her get away... and so did I."

Albus stood up and put a hand on Snape's shoulder. "I would offer you more phoenix tears... but..."

Snape grunted in understanding. Apparently even Fawkes' tears were opposed to the dark magics attached to Snape's shoulder. Their first attempt at pain relief after the Potions Master returned from reporting to the Dark Lord almost undid all of Voldemort's work and hurt nearly as bad as the Torture Curse.

As the professor left, Albus stopped to re-evaluate his position just as he has done every evening like clockwork since Harry Potter died. Before, Albus was the only one interested in young Gabrielle; but now he was in a race with Voldemort's followers. In death, Harry has fallen closer to darkness than he ever had in life... he would commit violence in Gabrielle's name and so would Jeanne, the ghostly war hero. A cloak of darkness has fallen on Magical England and the vulnerable citizens had no idea. Potter and his allies in France now had two of the Deathly Hallows in their possession as well as a muggleborn's guide to blood magic. Albus was tempted to spend more time around Sybill in the hopes of catching another true prophecy in the telling. If only he weren't so sure that rumors of an improper relationship would spread. Merlin help him. He wanted nothing less than for an angel to appear (from France preferably) and do something miraculous.

Praying for forgiveness was not an option he considered.

-o\O/o-

Gabby was this close to freaking out. Everyone in the whole school was looking at her.

From inside, Harry was doing all he could to keep Gabby together during her trip from the floo lobby to her classroom. Harry's dealt with this kind of thing before... the stares and the whispers... and Gabby even had her own admirers before her angelic side was revealed, but neither had ever caught someone praying at them before.

Gabby focused on the floor tiles at her feet while muttering a low, "Don't look at me..."

"My God, what is going on out here?" Salvation came for Little Angel in the form of Professor Royal. By luck and a few favors, Professor Royal managed to keep her position as Gabrielle's instructor for the new school year. "Miss Delacour! Please, come with me. Miss Bruyere and Miss Devereux have saved a seat for you already. Come, we mustn't keep them waiting."

"Yes, Professor." Gabrielle desperately reached for her teacher's hand.

Maybe if she hid behind Professor Royal and Aimee and Gigi and Harry all day, she wouldn't cry.

"Wait! Wait! I wanna see your wings!" A random boy yelled from the crowd.

"Me too!" A dozen more echoed in short order.

Soon the hallway rang with the cries of student's wanting to see an angel and asking if they can have a feather and where was her halo and if she was lying about being an angel and-

"SILENCE!" Professor Royal and a colleague both fired off noisemaker charms to cow the crowd. "Go to your classrooms now! Miss Delacour is a student just like any other and you will treat her with the respect she deserves. Go to class!"

By the time Amiee and Gigi got to their friend and pulled her into a seat near the windows, the poor girl was shaking like a leaf.

-o\O/o-

"Wow, Harry! I love what you've done here!"

Hermione stepped out of her own dream and into a real fantasy. She found herself standing on a cloud. There were clouds everywhere. Why, if only there were some cherubs, a Heavenly choir and an intensely bright light source behind a bearded man off to one side than this would be what a lot of people think of when they imagine Heaven.

"Light and airy, the whole place." Harry didn't look back her way just yet; in fact, he seemed preoccupied tracking a small speck in the distance. "Gabby's first day back in school was a rather unpleasant experience for the both of us so I decided to try something to give her some happy thoughts again."

The witch stepped over to Harry, delicately testing her footing the entire way, and tried to look at whatever it was he was looking at. The cloudy mists seemed to swallow her legs to mid calf, but there was some kind of solid surface holding them up that she just couldn't see clearly.

"Where is she then? I've had a rather nice first day and I'd love to trade stories with Little Angel."

As they peered into the distance, the speck Harry seemed to be tracking disappeared into one cloud some several hundred meters below. Another speck appeared much closer and a few hundred meters above them from the bottom of a different cloud.

Wait. That's not a speck. That's a...

"...eeeeeeeEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEeeeeeeee..."

"Harry! What have you done?" Five well manicured nails dug into the Boy-Who-Died's shoulder and spun him around. "Gabby's falling! She's screaming! Get her down from there this instant!"

Harry turned to deliver a reply when his voice caught in his throat. In ever increasing rage, Hermione watched Harry go slack jawed and slowly drop his eyes down her form. In any other dreamscape, that would have been quite flattering, but right now...

-SMACK-

"Get your mind off of me and onto Gabby! She's terrified in case you haven't noticed!"

"Oh... oh, that... right..."

Harry seemed to have trouble turning his eyes away from Hermione's Beauxbatons Academie uniform (complete with off center rounded hat and a surprisingly tight French braid holding her normally wild locks in check) and onto the task at hand. It's almost as if he knew Gabby wasn't in terrible peril and screaming bloody murder.

The boy with a bright red hand print on his left cheek turned towards the falling angel and put two fingers in his mouth. The resulting whistle caused Hermione to cover her ears. Honestly, how was that supposed to help?

Only, it did help. When next the screaming little girl popped out of a cloud above, she was much closer and she wasn't falling strait down. She was falling their way.

Maybe she wasn't falling?

Now that Gabby wasn't just a speck in the sky, Hermione could make out the edges of her half-extended wings in a position that Hermione had seen birds adopt in several photographs and a few nature programs from the telly. Closer still and she could begin to make out more details... how Gabby's arms were pointing down to her waist with knife edged hands positioned like little flaps for that extra bit of control that any little bird-girl might look for on her first big leap into the air. Her legs were spread as wide as her hands, skirt billowing between them in a rough approximation of tail feathers.

"...eeeeeeeEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEeeeeee..."

About fifty meters out, Gabby tried to slow down by flaring her wings. It didn't work and she went rocketing past their cloud in a loose corkscrew path.

"Drat! Missed again." Harry commented as he watched the little angel disappear into another cloud bank. "She's getting closer though..."

Hermione was incredulous. "You mean she's actually flying?"

"Diving mostly." Harry risked looking back at the vision in sky blue before him. "You have to remember, 'Mione, that our Little Angel is Veela. She was born with the natural instincts necessary for flight. She's not afraid of falling... just afraid of hitting the ground. It's simple really. I just took away the ground. Now she can fall... dive... fly however she wants until she's got it down pat without any fear at all of going splat on the ground below."

"But is she Veela? Is she really?"

"I don't think her being an angel means that she's not a Veela. The real question we should be asking ourselves is 'What are Veela, really?'. 'What are angels?' would be a good one too."

Before he could follow up his own question with a dozen more, Harry turned his head and concentrated. "Uh, oh." He turned to take a closer look at Little Angel as she fell down and away from them.

"What?"

"She changed her tone. And her wings... I don't see them anymore."

"Which means-"

"Which means she really is falling like a rock now. Don't panic though. She can't get hurt here no matter how hard she tries."

Hermione was about to ask rather heatedly what he meant by that when Harry suddenly turned and pointed an open palm towards the stratus cloud immediately above them. Calling on his control of Gabby's dreamscape, Harry moved the next portal for Gabby to fall out of.

"...eeeeeeeeEEEEEEEEEE-" Gabby appeared directly above and - poof- ploughed into the 'ground' nearby.

"I'm okay!" A muffled yell could be heard coming out of the twists and twirls of mist that marked the little girl's landing zone.

Gabby regained her footing and staggered over to the two teens.

"Is your shoulder hurt, Gabby?" Hermione was concerned over how Gabby was rubbing her right shoulder.

The little silver blonde shook her head but didn't stop rubbing her shoulder. "Flying is hard."

Gabby giggled for a moment until she saw what Hermione was wearing. Her eyes lost their sparkle and she dropped her gaze to the mists at her feet.

"Gabby? Harry says you had a rough time at school today. Can you tell me about it?" Gabby shook her head. "Please. I just want to help make it better."

Hermione knelt down in front of Gabby and tried to make eye contact, but Gabby just looked away again. Harry walked around them and started running his fingers through Gabby's hair.

"It's okay, Angel. I'll tell her."

Harry told Hermione about Gabby's return to school and the unruly crowd that Madame Royal had to bust up. He told her about how Gabby spent the whole day with Gigi on one side and Aimee on the other; they stopped notes from piling up and told anyone who was being to nosey to go away. If the morning walk in was bad, the afternoon walk out to the school floo lobby was horrible. Once again, other students wouldn't leave her alone. Her professor escorted Gabby the whole way, but she couldn't stop the stares and whispers. There were a few flashes in the room, but the Professors couldn't figure out who had just taken pictures. No doubt those would find their way into newspapers tomorrow.

Apolline was furious, of course. After holding her daughter as Gabby cried herself to sleep, Apolline spent the rest of the afternoon floo calling Joliebatons Academie's Headmaster and calmly discussing

what would have to change if he wanted to keep Gabrielle as a student. 'Calmly discussing' for a Veela mother means that there were no fireballs involved.

"I don't want to go back to school." Gabrielle sounded miserable.

"I'm sorry Gabby. I wish I could be with you every day but Beauxbatons is a boarding school and I will be staying there in my dorm room until Christmas Holidays. We can still visit like this every night though."

Now that Gabby's flying lesson for the night was clearly over, Harry willed the world around them to change. In a blur of colors and light, the three moved from cloudy Heaven to cloudless Paris and the Delacour penthouse patio.

"Speaking of, how was your day 'Mione?"

Feeling self conscious about her appearance now that the focus was off of Gabby for now, Hermione smoothed out her uniform skirt and checked that her hat was at the proper angle.

"Well... having been there over the weekend for orientation, today was the first day I spent the whole day in uniform. The Head Girl... Laura Adriener, I think you'd recognize her from the Triwizard group... was very helpful in introducing me to some of the boys and girls I'm now sharing classes with. After spending the last two days with eleven and twelve year olds, I was really happy to get to know more students my own age."

"Still doing the braid then? It's nice. Shows more of your neck. "

Hermione blushed. Harry's comment made her think of what getting kissed there would feel like.

"Laura... well she explained that it's Beauxbatons tradition for every First Year witch to wear the same hair style for their first winter in the castle. It's been the French braid for the last one hundred and twelve years straight. Laura mentioned that the student council would consider giving me a pass due to my age and status as a transfer student, but I offered to show school spirit by following the tradition properly."

"Fleur told me about the braid. I want to do it too. Why can't we go to Beauxbatons together?"

"Just two more years, Little Angel. I'll be in my last year when you enter your first. I promise to spoil you rotten the whole year." Hermione smiled. It seemed that they were beginning to distract Gabby from her dark thoughts.

"Okay!"

Hermione spent the next half hour or so describing her new classmates and teachers. Harry and Gabrielle already knew a fair bit about the school itself from talks with Fleur and Segolene so Hermione stayed away from describing school grounds in any detail. She tried to interest them in her classes, but Gabby was too young and Harry was both too far behind and too dead to pay her details any mind.

"Honestly, Harry. Just because you're a ghost doesn't mean you should stop trying to better yourself." Hermione huffed after catching the two making faces at each other.

As Gabby started to sing the 'Harry's in trouble' song, Harry himself just laughed.

"When's the last time you caught a ghost studying for their O.W.L.'s, 'Mione? Myrtle never took her exams and Jeanne still can't read."

"You could teach her. Study together... you can both pick up books and open them, though I'm not sure if that's something Myrtle ever figured out."

"I suppose teaching Jeanne to read might be fun... IF she agrees... but it's not like I'm going to pass my practicals. I can hold a wand but I can't cast with it. Tried already, you see."

Hermione began to pace back and forth, her mind desperately searching for a reason... something to make Harry agree to keep studying. Sure he was dead at fourteen, but she just couldn't fathom him being a Fourth Year forever. Maybe she just didn't want to grow up without him.

Then it hit her.

"Gabby's life could depend on it, you know."

"What?"

Hermione had no quicker way to get Harry's attention save perhaps pointing out a threat to her own life.

"Second Task. Third Task. Bern. Now she comes close to dying or worse in Domrémy-la-Pucelle. She's been attacked by mermen, dementors, mercenaries, the British Ministry of Magic and Albus Dumbledore. All in six months, Harry." Hermione stepped in close and kissed the slap mark on Harry's face. "Our Little Angel is more of a peril magnet than you are and by some miracle she slips through Death's clutches by the very narrowest of margins every time."

Hermione saw the fear in Harry's eyes. He already died for Gabrielle. He learned how to guard her dreams and how to touch things... as a ghost what more could he do?

"You've got a lot of time on your hands, Harry. All I'm asking you to do is use it for Gabby."

Harry looked at the patio stones at his feet and scratched at his scar... something Hermione hadn't seen him do for a very long time.

"You're- you're right, of course." Harry seemed to nod and rub at his eyes at the same time. "I felt so useless at Bern, you know?"

Hermione nodded. She didn't fare any better than Harry that time.

"You could learn a thing or two as well, yeah?" Harry had a bit of an upturn at the edge of his mouth that Hermione didn't quite know what to think of. Wait... what was he looking at?

"Of course I could. I take my education quite seriously, thank you very much."

Harry smiled. Hermione wasn't entirely sure she liked that smile.

"You are not dressed properly to deal with dark wizards. Will they teach you how to run in those shoes and that skirt?" Hermione could see Harry's pearly whites now. "Ten seconds."

Hermione took an involuntary step back, absently rolling one foot over a modest yet stylish heel.

"I mean to pin you to the floor and tickle the piss out of you unless you can get away, 'Mione. Five seconds."

Feeling quite like a gazelle who has just spotted a tiger about to pounce, Hermione chose flight over fight. She hiked up her skirt and ran as fast as her dress shoes would allow. In the background, Hermione could hear a little girl giggling like mad and joking about kissie face.

Harry had to shake himself out of a trance five seconds after the countdown ended. Were those garters he saw when she sacrificed modesty for speed?

As he started running after his prey a brief cry and a small crash echoed out from inside the penthouse. Sounds like someone slipped on a polished marble floor. Good, he could make up those five lost seconds. Out on the patio, Gabby chirped and flapped her wings in approval of Harry's impending victory.

As Hermione was pulling herself up and cursing fashionable shoes, Little Angel looked out over dream-Paris and felt instinct call. Harry and Mione were going to be too busy to play with her for a while... and Gabby was pretty sure Momma and Poppa wouldn't just let her go flying whenever she wanted once awake... so she skipped over to the patio railing and climbed up. As a giggly shriek of defeat escaped the open doors behind her, Gabby spread her wings wide and jumped.

-o\O/o-

12 september 1995

Dearest Mother,

Rome is beautiful and the locals are treating us better than I had hoped for. They think that their comments about demons and

burning me at the stake go unnoticed if they are said in Latin. Do they not understand what language most wand spells are based on? It is good that we are actually learning valuable information in the Vatican archives or I would have burned the whole place down at least twice that I can recall. Segolene sends her love and hopes that we can all have a proper tour of Rome at some point in the future. I agree that the city is beautiful and many local chefs are quite skilled.

Is Gabrielle coping better with her fame? Please tell me if you do pull her out of Joliebatons. My sleep is disturbed every night by visions of monstrous children grabbing for our Little Angel as she fights her way to class.

Thank you for convincing Father to allow us this trip. While a classic Grand Tour would be far too ambitious with England the way it is, our research trip is sure to be of great help in discovering what makes Little Angel so angelic. I have yet to find a correlation between angelic sightings and Veela burnings, but we have only looked a century back so far and we could be looking for the wrong clues. The archives are very big. Even with the hatred most clergy have for our kind, I am glad that His Holiness asked us to research how Gabrielle 'ascended' to her new form. Inquisitorial monks were quite good at recording the where, when and who of everything they destroyed in the name of Christ. Even without our own records, I am getting a good idea of the historic migrations our ancestors experienced. With the clues Segolene and I am digging up, we will surely find the old temples rumored to be in Ukraine.

Grand-mère has done us a great favor by pulling strings with other Veela high matrons. The local Veela are very hospitable... after I prove we are not here to stay. Segolene and I are never alone outside of Vatican offices nor is our escort solely Veela. Madame Loren's cousins and nieces each have their own stable of boyfriends and bodyguards which can be counted on to lend a hand. Even better, their stories of the way things used to be are all so interesting because they are not the same stories Grand-mère tells. I tell you mother, by the end of this trek, I will have enough notes to write a new Veela History.

Nathalie will be so disappointed. Segolene and I are fast becoming scholars and not the flighty socialites she was hoping for, though I should warn you Segolene and Nathalie have kept their

correspondence up. Segolene still values the connections to be found in Nathalie's little black book.

Both Segolene and I approve of your plan for the nineteenth and believe a trip to Beauxbatons before making for Greece would be a welcome rest from certain Vatican clerical workers. Such filthy looks they give us when they think we cannot see. No wonder they pray for forgiveness so often.

I think of you and Father and Gabby every day.

Your Loving Daughter,

Fleur

-o\O/o-

September 16th, 1995

Fleur (and Segolene!),

How is your trip going? I've always wanted to spend a day at the Pantheon or perhaps a week between all of the museums and galleries. Who am I kidding? I'd need a month at least before I could leave Rome!

I know Régine wants your research to be held in confidence, but I can't help but wonder what it is that has turned Gabrielle into the Little Angel you always claimed her to be. Why, I can't even look at Lily's last journal without turning to pick up a Bible or a book on angels. I would worry about Harry trusting me with his mother's journal if I didn't know he's even more desperate to learn about Gabby's condition than I am. He claims that he read all of the easily understandable parts before I left for school, but it was his mother's and he just handed it over!

Before I lose myself in recounting what I have learned about angels during my free time, I am honor bound to report on my Firebolt practice. First, I have made time twice weekly for early morning flights. Second, even if I were not already a minor celebrity in Beauxbatons, I have been 'discovered' by the local quidditch and racing clubs due to these practices. I've managed to throw off the quidditch fans, but the racing club is mostly witches right now and

they keep pointing out that there are no bludgers involved. I don't know why they want me; I still haven't taken Harry's broom anywhere near top speed. Third (and don't tell anyone), I kind of like the racing idea. Harry liked playing quidditch but what he really loved was flying and flying fast. I want Harry to see me fly. To be honest, I want him to see me win. Okay, enough of brooms and racing.

Now, I can't forward my notes as of yet, but I'm sure to have compiled all I'm learning about angels by Christmas Holiday. As I have written before, whenever I haven't had a charm to practice or an essay to write or a slope to solve for, every free minute inside of Beauxbatons has been spent researching angels. The English word originated from Latin angelus itself derived from the Greek ángelos or 'messenger'. Hebrew uses the word mal'ach which means the same thing. Angels have a well known place in the Christian, Jewish and Islamic religions but I hadn't realized that such beings are part of other religions as well. Zoroastrianism, the primary Iranian religion preceding Islam, features beings which closely equate to Archangels and Guardian Angels who maintain the functions and order of the cosmos and guard both Heaven and individual mortal beings when they need divine guidance. Hinduism also has a class of beings known as Deva who, depending on the book you read, are either lesser gods in their own right or angelic beings. These Deva have been known to give boons to those who worship them but are not known for delivering messages from their Supreme Lord.

It's important, I think, to note that many angels and their close analogues in other religions do not have feathered wings nor are they always described as having halos. Artwork and written descriptions of angels that do have these traits appear in certain times and not others. Nor are all angels human in their basic form. Of the three Spheres and nine Choirs of angels commonly accepted by medieval Christian theologians, no angel in the First Sphere is human in appearance. Seraphim have six wings and emit such light from their being that none can look upon them. Cherubim (not to be confused with the cutesy cherubs of Valentine's Day) each have four faces, of which only one is that of a man. Ophanim are wheels within wheels rimmed by hundreds of eyes! Sounds like a UFO to me and aliens sound as silly as magic to a proper British girl born of two dentists, so obviously I didn't believe in those when I was ten. Now? I'm not so sure.

It is when I read descriptions of the other six Choirs that the stereotypical 'winged human' ideal comes into play. Gabrielle spends most of her time as an especially beautiful human even if she sheds a bit of that humanity to don her wings. Even here I can see how she compares favorably to other angels. They are commonly referred to as having a man's form but also as being supremely beautiful so I wonder how much Biblical detail is influenced by translation and a male dominated society. The Archangel Michael is generally understood as being male, but Jeanne claimed the two were too close in appearance and presence for Gabby to be anything other than an angel. The first positively identified angel in modern history just happens to beat the odds and come out the rare female? Even considering we are witches discussing what makes an angel genuine, I still don't buy that. After Gabrielle is properly trained in her wandcraft, I expect she would have the magical skill, talents and power required to recreate any angelic appearance in either Testament of the Bible short of those where whole cities are smote by fire and brimstone.

Has she shown any hints of being a seer? I can't imagine who's messages she could deliver aside from Harry's and, much as I love him, he is no all-seeing Divine Creator.

Halos themselves are representative of more-than-natural power in many religions aside from Christianity. Artwork has been uncovered showing Muhammad and Buddha to be crowned by halos. Ra, the ancient Egyptian sun god, is often identified by the solar disc above his head. Furthermore, halos are closely related to other physical manifestations of power such as auras, aureola, mandorla, Glory and the Crown of Immortality.

Even Gabby's somewhat owlish appearance with a near full body coating of downy feathers and her avian eyes and beak correlate to various angels and deities. The Seraphim Seraphiel is thought to have the head of an eagle, and one of the four faces of each Cherubim is an eagle. Ra is commonly depicted with the head of a falcon and many other Egyptian deities are also thought to have the heads of animals, though wings are not as common a trait. Could there be a connection?

Despite spending my first ten years' Sundays devoting mornings to the Church of England, I have never felt the need to open three different Bibles and cross reference them before. Add to that two

magical creature texts, two magical history tomes and one survey of world religion and you get a tangle of research even I find to be daunting at times.

I originally stopped praying at my bedside when I was seven and considered myself above such childish games. Now I pray every night for God to watch over you two, Gabrielle and Harry. Not that I'm sure it's a Him... it could be a Her or some of Them... but I digress. I also thank 'Him' that Harry, Gabby and you two were all brought into my life when you were. For the first time I do not feel like an only child.

Love,

Hermione

-o\O/o-

Finally. Just over two weeks into her new school and Hermione is beginning to feel like she belongs. All of the staring has stopped and her place in the social hierarchy of this rather courtly school is becoming clear.

It's not her home, not that Hogwarts ever felt like home to her either, but Beauxbatons was beginning to live up to the hype. She was well known, but not 'popular'. She could live with that. She had a few real friends and for the first time felt like it wouldn't be all that difficult to make more of them. No one called her a 'mudblood' here. True, a handful of 'upper crust' students had a problem with her middle class English roots, but those cliques tended to stick to themselves and pretend she didn't exist. All in all, this was much better than spending a morning as Malfoy's Victim of the Day.

"Excuse me, Hermione?"

She turned around. "Good morning, Laura. Can I help you with something?"

The Head Girl looked to both sides before dipping in a little closer. "We are hosting important guests today. Madam Maxime has requested your presence in the Yellow Room."

Just when she felt like she was beginning to fit in, something comes along to single her out yet again. No doubt Ron would say 'bloody hell' right about now if he were here.

"Thank you, Laura. Perhaps we'll see each other again at lunch?"

Laura smiled and nodded before walking over to a few of her closer friends.

Hermione mourned the breakfast she would never eat and made for the nearby Yellow Room. Hermione remembered the smaller meeting hall, one of a dozen such halls distinguished by visual themes set about the school's main floor. These rooms served both as special function classrooms and rooms for more social functions like clubs or private meetings. Hermione suppressed a snicker as she thought of Beauxbatons becoming a convention center should the market for magical schools ever dry up.

It was this idle thought passing through her mind which kept Hermione completely out of it and off balance even as she passed through a large yellow door with gold leaf detailing.

"HAPPY BIRTHDAY!"

She nearly died of shock. Magical fireworks shot out of table displays and burst immediately overhead, each fiery orb looking like Hermione as she appeared either on her eleventh birthday or as she did today. Once the red and orange flares faded permitting her to see again, the sixteen year old witch found that the Yellow Room was full of her friends and family... all of them.

Hermione would have wiped the tears of happiness out of her eyes if her arms weren't full of a happily chirping nine year old angel.

She almost couldn't believe it. Mum. Dad. Beauxbatons lets muggles onto school grounds? And Harry and Jeanne were both here! Not that she wasn't beyond happy that her dead boyfriend and their friend, the Maid of Orleans, had both come to visit her on her birthday, but her overloaded emotions were defaulting to logical sub-routines. Wasn't this school warded against spectral activity? Maybe the ghost repellers were part of a hollow shell type ward...

Cake! Cake! Cake!

A hyperactive Gabby swung away from Hermione and began to pull her to the cake and present table, negligently batting others out of the way with her wings as she went. She was at a party- Hermione's birthday party- and she was skipping her school and visiting the big kid school and that cake smelled so goooooood...

"Gabrielle! Stop this instant!"

Hermione watched as Gabby's angelic form dropped away and took the little girl's good mood with it.

"I'm sorry, Momma, but the cake smelled so good."

"Yes, we're getting to that, dear, but Hermione may want to greet everyone who came to see her first. I'm sure we can still have cake before she has to head off to class."

"Yes, Momma." Pout, pout, pout.

"Don't worry Gabby. I promise you will have cake soon, okay?" Yes! As Hermione wrapped Little Angel in a warm hug, crystal blue eyes peeked over the older girl's shoulder and stared longingly at cake.

Hermione got her hugs and personal birthday wishes from everyone before too long. Madame Maxime was near the head of the line as she had a school to run. Her parents gushed over how proud they were of her and how grown up she looked, not at all the little ball of sunshine that teethed on old issues of National Geographic. Duly embarrassed, Hermione introduced her parents to the half dozen Beauxbatons girls that had been invited. She also introduced the girls to the elder Delacours though no introductions were necessary for Fleur and Segolene. In the background Sirius and Nathalie began to distract Gabby so she wouldn't forsake her upbringing and attack the mountain of chocolate and magically animated icing that dominated one end of the Yellow Room. Hermione's new friends were almost as high as Gabby by the time they were all introduced to Hermione's boyfriend and other ghost friend. The Boy-Who-Lived and Jeanne d'Arc... sure these girls were genuine friends but that didn't mean they couldn't be fan-girls too.

By the time Hermione had given her still favorite Defense professor and werewolf a hug, she finally learned who made the cake.

"Dobby!"

POP

"Yes, Missy 'Mione? Dobby is here!"

"You made my birthday cake?"

"Yes, yes!" The diminutive elf suddenly grabbed both ears and seemed to be terribly afraid. "You... you is liking Dobby's cake, Miss? Yes?"

"Oh... Oh yes! It's a wonderful cake, Dobby. Thank you ever so much for making it!"

Dobby fell to his knees and raised his hands to the sky. "Dobby is lucky to be working for wizards and witches like the Great Wizard Ghost Mister Harry Potter Sir and Missy 'Mione! I will work my hardest for you and your family for ever and ever! Oh, Dobby must goes to Lord Delcour's house to cry tears of happiness and joy!"

POP

"What was that?"

Jeanne had never seen a house elf before. Luckily, neither Hermione nor Harry were stuck with the sole responsibility of proving that Dobby was not, in fact, a hellish demon sent to poison their celebratory feast. Perhaps if Harry had taken advantage of the fact that Alain and Apolline both grew up... if not true Catholics than at least very close approximations of them... then maybe he could have convinced Jeanne to meet Gabby peacefully the first time.

Cake was finally served, and Gabby was well pleased. Apolline was beginning to rethink her decision to pull Gabrielle out of Joliebatons for the day once she saw the sugar hit her daughter's blood stream. The rest of Apolline's day would be spent reining her hyper angel in. Dobby must have used magic to stuff that much sugar into the cake.

There were more presents than Hermione ever remembered getting for any Christmas or Birthday before. From her parents, she received a delicate gold locket. Somehow they had it charmed so

that it would alternately show a picture of themselves or her and Harry's first kiss. She didn't think she'd ever take it off. From Harry, she received a card and a handpicked bouquet of orchids. In the attached hand written card, Harry explained that he considered red roses too plain and common for her. As Hermione began to wonder if she would ever stop crying this morning, she received another shock when another handmade card was placed in front of her. It was a very simple card with a single angel drawn onto the front face. Inside... inside she learned that Harry kept his promise.

'Happy Birthday Hermione

From your friend,

Jehanne'

Two weeks ago, Jeanne did not know how to spell anything other than her own name, nor did she understand what emphasis was placed on a person's birthday in this day and age, but she is a very smart girl and a quick study.

Hermione promised herself that she would work something out tonight with Gabby in their dreams so that she could spend most of the night snogging and cuddling the best ghost boyfriend ever.

As Hermione's first class period drew close, she thanked everyone profusely and said her farewells to those who couldn't spend more than an hour or two away from their jobs. As it turned out, the Delacour ladies were making a day of it to help introduce Jeanne to the magical world. After all, had just one meeting on her eleventh birthday gone differently, Jeanne would likely have grown up a witch just like any girl in the school.

They even attended a class on History of Magic...

"You mean to tell me that the wizards of France had me burned at the stake because I was a witch!" Jeanne's day was turning out to be one shocking revelation after another.

The history professor, a respectable looking man who seemed like a clean shaven Albus Dumbledore, did his best to clear things up.

"It's quite a bit more complicated than that, my dear Miss d'Arc." The old man drew on all of his courage to continue. Jeanne did not look happy. "You see, they would likely have left you alone were it not for your bouts of accidental magic. As you became more famous as a Holy Warrior, you also became famous for performing minor miracles... things that the muggles of the time attributed to your God given purpose in life. Unfortunately, the local magical lords were concerned that your magic might do something truly spectacular in front of all those muggles causing them to stop their war just long enough to begin a serious witch hunt.

"This small band of French magical lords decided that you had done enough for France, that she could take care of herself again and set about ensuring you were captured or killed as soon as possible. In fact, the night before your famous capture, a magic suppressing potion was secretly added to your meal to prevent you from miraculously escaping yet again. From the time you were imprisoned until your execution, you were fed the suppression potion at least once a week.

"I am truly sorry, Miss d'Arc, for what those lords did to you. You will find that there isn't a single wizard or witch in France today that agrees with what they did. More than one have spent their entire lives researching ways to travel through time for the express purpose of saving you, but alas, time is a fearsome foe which bows to no mortal man."

As Jeanne watched in stunned silence, the whole Third Year History of Magic class apologized to her for the actions of their ancestors.

With spectral tears in her eyes, she forgave them.

-o\O/o-

"Harry! What are you doing here?" Jeanne took a closer look at her friend. "And why are you not see-through?"

With a huge grin on his face, Harry walked over to Jeanne and gave her a hug. She felt it! In fact, she could feel the grass between her toes and... was that a gentle breeze?

"What... where... is this the dreamworld Gabrielle was telling me about before she went to bed?"

If anything, Harry's grin got bigger as he shook his head in the negative.

"Not at all. Neither she nor 'Mione are quite ready to dream tonight and I have been chosen to help you in a very special way!"

"How?" Jeanne was confused enough that it didn't register that he was speaking English and she still understood him clearly.

Without answering, Harry grabbed her hand and pulled her along behind him as he cut a path through the endless fields of grass that surrounded them. She put up no resistance. For a time, the two dead teens simply walked through soft, sweet grass as gentle winds tickled at their skin. Some minutes later... or was it years later? Jeanne couldn't tell... some time later, Harry brought Jean to a stop at the base of a hill above which the sun shone brightly. In fact, the sun was so low in the sky that one might expect to be able to touch it from the top of the hill.

"Here we are, Jeanne."

"And where is here? You still haven't told me how you would 'help' me."

"Well... it's hard to explain... even to someone like you who's had more contact with the afterlife than the other people I've helped the same way. To be quite honest, I still don't know how I get tapped to do these things, but I am starting to like it more especially since I get to help you of all people."

This, of course, did not help Jeanne understand anything at all, so Harry continued.

"When you finally got into the church, we were all a bit surprised you didn't just poof and fly off to Heaven for your eternal rest, yeah?" Jeanne nodded. She expected that as much as anyone. "As near as I can tell, you were really being held back by that little bit of doubt and confusion on account of your actually being a witch after all... and now that you made your peace with magical France via that little love session in History of Magic today... well... you're done."

"What?"

Harry took Jeanne by the shoulders and pointed her to the hill and the sun beyond which hadn't moved any higher or lower than before.

"Just walk up that hill and you'll be done with the land of the living for good. Right up there, Jeanne, it's everything you've been praying for all this time! I really am happy for you... you deserve this more than anyone I know."

"Are you coming with me?" Jeanne may not have known Harry for very long, but she was of the opinion that he deserved this as much as she did.

"Ohhh, no... I couldn't leave Gabby behind like that. She still needs me- and I'm not all that sure that I could be happy in some other plane of existence if I had to move on alone. Not sure I could leave 'Mione either even if Gabby never happened..."

Jeanne looked at the hill and the bright warm globe hovering almost within reach.

"What if... Gabrielle's still in danger, isn't she? Those Englishmen are going to try something again, aren't they?"

Harry smiled again. "Saving Gabby is my job. I don't think anyone expects you to save France twice, Jeanne."

The centuries old Saint looked behind her, searching for a sign of the little angel even if she didn't realize that was what she was doing.

"If it helps, the gate is open to you now and will continue to be open even should you choose to go back with me."

"I just don't know what to do... what would Gabrielle say?"

"If she's not a Messenger of the Lord, does it matter?"

"I begin to think she is one, even if she hasn't fully grown into her role."

"In that case you may find that God wants you to sit down for tea and crepes with Gabby and Gigi and Aimee and we must all wear

the biggest hats we can find. Don't look at me like that! She's already done it to me twice."

Jeanne tried to hold in her amusement but failed with a very unladylike snort.

"You know, Harry... I begin to think you are an angel too."

"Me? What makes you think that?"

"You defend the innocent. You are a spirit who guards Gabrielle from all possible dangers. And most of all, you are a messenger."

"A messenger?"

"Yes. What are you doing now? You are telling me how to get from Earth to Heaven on God's behalf. You are one of His Messengers. You say you've done it before, yes?"

"Errr, twice. Krum chose to keep living and Dawlish... well I'm glad he chose the wrong path. Safe to say you won't be meeting up with him anytime soon."

"So you are a servant of God even if you won't admit it to yourself! I think I can trust you to take care of Gabrielle without me." She looked again between the hilltop star and the infinite horizon behind them before taking a deep breath. "Alright. I know what to do now."

"Brilliant!" Harry dropped the desire to defend his non-angelness and closed in for one more hug, just in case. He also bussed her cheeks for good measure. "Whatever you do, I wish you the best."

Harry stepped away from Jeanne and watched her make the biggest decision of her afterlife.

End Chapter

Chapter Thirteen: Cloak and Dagger

It was raining.

The sun was coming up but low hanging clouds and light rain blocked any visual proof of the fact. There were no clear signs of just where the isolated little strip of beach was other than some nameless coastline. Dreary and desolate, it was a perfect place for secret meetings.

A small boat approached the shore. Simple and wooden, it was little larger than an average rowboat. There were no oarsmen nor were there any oars, no inboard or outboard motors churned away and yet the boat continued to move steadily forward. Magic.

A lone passenger sat in the rearmost seat, cloak covering all identifiable features except one fair skinned feminine hand on the rudder. As soon as the boat's bow struck sand, the cloaked figure was up and moving. She stepped over two central benches and as far forward as she could get before hopping over the side. A wave caught the woman mid-hop and swept both feet out from under her. Her hand slipped on the rain slicked top rail, taking away her last chance of a recovery and causing her to go completely under.

"Goddammit!" Tonks screamed once her head cleared the surf again.

Without a single shred of dignity left, the soaked and salty Briton sloshed ashore. Rather than pull channel soaked pink hair out of her eyes, she simply willed it shorter until it could stand straight up even when wet.

"...bloody ocean..." She muttered as she reached for her wand. Getting dry was her new priority.

"Don't move!" A harsh voice called out from behind.

Tonks froze immediately. Perhaps if she hadn't completely ruined her dramatic return, she may have been looking for border guards rather than looking to freshen up a bit.

"Identify yourself." A second voice called.

It was time to see if all of her preparation and planning had finally played off or if it was her destiny to be stunningly sexy fish food. Tonks mentally went over the coded phrase she was supposed to use for a successful trip to England and back. It wasn't hard, really. It was a phrase that she doubted any pureblood English magical would recognize but she's been off book with it since about the age of ten.

"NOBODY expects the Spanish Inquisition! Amongst our weaponry... are such diverse elements as... fear, surprise, ruthless efficiency and an almost fanatical devotion to the Pope!"

After an uncomfortable ten seconds, Tonks got her reply. "Nymphadora Tonks. I 'ave a portkey for you. Please turn around."

Three French aurors in common street clothes approached her as she turned. One of them was nice enough to cast a water repelling charm followed by a drying charm. Now that her hair wasn't acting like a wet rag anymore, she willed it back to chin length with a few new blue highlights mixed into her favorite pink.

"Thanks, luv." She looked between the three men. "About that portkey?"

The lead auror held out his hand and presented her portkey. – Squeak, Squeak– Through the rain, which was beginning to come down in sheets, she grabbed the rubber ducky and smiled.

"How cute! I used to have one just like him! Took him with me every time I got all sudsy. Mind you, that was just last week... I wasn't about to take Mister Squeaky with me on a hush-hush trip to You-Know-Where, was I?"

The lead French auror tapped Tonks's portkey sending her off to a Department of the Interior office and a thorough debriefing.

"Did you have to do that? I wanted to hear more about Mister Squeaky and sudsy time." The second auror complained.

"She's British. Don't you have standards?" The third man spoke up.

"She's a metamorph, or didn't you see her hair change with no wandwork. Shapeshifter trumps British."

"You two shut up or I'll tell your wives about your mistresses!"

"Yes, sir." Came the stereo answer.

Three soft –pop-'s later and the beach was uninhabited once again, the only item of interest being an abandoned wooden boat coming ashore with the tide and slowly sinking from rainfall.

-o\O/o-

Ron hated detentions these days. Not that he ever really liked them before, but there was a time when Ron could usually count on his best mate to be serving detention right there with him.

The young Gryffindor bit back a curse and stopped to collect himself. Maybe this was why 'Mione had no trouble leaving Hogwarts. Ron himself couldn't go ten paces now without seeing something in the halls and classrooms that still reminded him of Harry. Just forget the library. Whole bloody thing reminded him of Hermione.

"Sod it all." No use. He couldn't hold it in while walking to yet another detention. At least this one wasn't with Snape.

"What a ray of sunshine you are. And what did she get you for tonight, then?"

A Hufflepuff girl. Susan, he thought her name was. If Ron weren't in such a melancholy mood, he might have been distracted staring at the two inviting mounds which held her yellow and black tie snugly in place. As it was, he hardly saw more than her shoes.

"Professor Umbridge can't go a single class without saying something about Harry or 'Mione anymore. It was bad enough when that worthless textbook of hers put me to sleep faster than Binns could, but now it's like she's got it in for me!" Ron looked up for the first time. "Just today... just today she went on a half-hour rant about what a traitor to England 'Mione is and how she wasn't surprised at all to hear that Harry died in the tournament, him being a half-blood and all. I couldn't take it anymore- I told her off for disrespecting Harry like that."

"And then she gave you detention." Susan offered.

"And then she took fifty house points and gave me detention every night for a week!" Ron spat back.

Ron looked past Susan's strawberry blonde braids to the classroom door behind her.

"Could you move a bit? My detention's in there."

"Mine too." Susan gave a half smile with her reply. "She's been giving me trouble ever since she found out my last name was Bones. I wrote to my auntie about it, but she says she can't help me aside from a bit of advice about keeping a stiff upper lip and remembering the DADA curse. At worst, we only have to deal with the horrid woman for one year, right?"

"That's right!" Ron smiled at that. Honestly, it was the best news he'd heard all term. "Might as well get it over with, yeah?"

Susan nodded and stepped to the side. Let the Gryffindor open Hell's Gate if he dares. Ron stepped past her and opened the door without hesitation.

"- in Azkaban where he belongs!" A shrill voice blared through the open door and across both Fifth Year students.

"You stay right there." Professor Umbridge ordered whoever was in there with her before allowing her voice to become sugary sweet again. "Students, do come in. Plenty of room for everyone."

They stepped in as instructed.

"Be a dear and get the door behind you? That's a good girl." Susan reached for the door and pushed it closed, not that she liked being ordered about like a small child but she didn't need to make things worse by being defiant now. "Please, you two... take your seats in the first row with Miss Lovegood."

"Where was I? Oh yes." Dolores chose to ignore her two new arrivals for the time being and finish her discussion with the younger Ravenclaw witch. "As I was saying... that worthless rag your father puts out is gone, seized, and there's nothing you can do about that, is there little girl?"

Ron looked at 'Loony' Lovegood. Sure she was mental, but he felt bad watching this old hag gloat over Luna's life getting torn apart. And what was that bloody bandage doing on Luna's left wrist? Didn't she know that was what the Hospital Wing is for?

To Luna's credit, she didn't seem to be any more or less interested in the Professor's insults than in anything else. All the girl did was stare at a torch on the far wall and delicately hold her injured left wrist.

"Nothing to say now, Miss Lovegood? You seemed to have a lot to say in class, didn't you?" There was a disturbing fire in Professor Umbridge's eyes. It made Ron uneasy.

Umbridge turned her ire to Susan next. "And you. Thought you could go crying to dear Aunt Amelia, did you?"

Susan's eyes went wide. How did the old bat find out?

"Are you forgetting, Miss Bones, that while your aunt was booted out of the Ministry for her disgraceful performance this past year, I... Senior Under-Secretary to the Minister for Magic... still enjoy the trappings of power? Nothing enters or leaves this castle without my knowing about it!"

Susan began to push herself further back in her chair. Professor Umbridge was being far more aggressive tonight than she remembered from her other detentions. Having sufficiently cowed her second target, Umbridge turned to Ron.

"Mister Weasley... " The woman was grinning now. She seemed to think Ron worthy of special attention tonight. Not good. "I'll have you know that shouting lies in my classroom will no longer be tolerated."

"They weren't lies!" Ron knew he was just getting deeper into it, but it couldn't be helped.

"Silence!" She pulled out her wand and cast a silencing charm on the redhead.

Luna didn't seem to notice, but Susan was nearly sick with worry.

"I... am an official representative of the Ministry of Magic. The Ministry decrees your fanciful gibberish to be contrary to the truth of the matter... almost treasonous." The professor inched closer to Ron's seat and leaned closer still. "I'll let you in on a little secret. It won't be so much of a secret tomorrow, but then I feel like celebrating a little. You see, our beloved Minister Malfoy had just signed an Educational Decree that gives me a free hand in rooting out the undesirables within Hogwarts. When the three of you go down to breakfast tomorrow, you will find that I have been appointed the first ever High Inquisitor of Hogwarts!"

Umbridge stood up a little straighter before turning to retrieve something from her desk.

"At long last, the Ministry will have the authority necessary to mold the minds and hearts of England's future wizards and witches. What this means for you three is that I will be able correct all of the flaws in our educational system. I will do away with all non-Ministry approved subjects and lessons. I will rid the school of questionable information which has not been verified by Ministry researchers. I will give the boot to under-performing staff and bad seeds as well."

When Dolores came back from her desk, she had clean parchments and long black quills for each of them. Luna jerked back unsteadily, much to Ron and Susan's alarm. The younger Ravenclaw actually looked upset now. What did she know that they didn't?

"Tonight, I shall do my best to turn the three of you into proper, respectful members of our society before I am forced to consider expulsion. It's not something I want to consider really... you are all purebloods even if you can't be bothered to behave appropriately. Now, each of you shall be writing lines for me."

Ron forgot he had already been silenced and tried to ask a question.

"No interruptions!" He fell back away from Umbridge's harsh bark. "The three of you shall all write 'I shall not tell lies'. You shall not stop writing until I call for you to do so."

Susan raised her hand.

"Yes, Miss Bones?"

"We haven't any ink, Professor."

"That won't be a problem, Miss Bones. I think you will find we have more than enough. Now pick up your quill and start writing."

-o\O/o-

"Welcome back, Misses McGonagall." Apolline greeted Gabrielle's magical tutor as the old Scot stepped through the Delacour maison-forte's grand entry. "I hope you don't mind coming in through the front. Auror command insisted we shut down our floo connection for security reasons."

"Think nothing of it dear. I had no idea how stunning your estate was until I now. Why, the McGonagall family seat is considered quite roomy back home but even your gate house is bigger." Minerva straightened out her skirt a bit. "I should like to take the lessons outside if you have no objections. It's actually quite warm if you consider what Scotland is like this time of year."

Apolline laughed as she nodded her approval. That would be quite convenient. Soon the portkey from school will drop Gabby off under a veranda built around one of the main home's side gardens. Since her youngest adores that garden for its butterflies, Apolline knew it would help lift Gabby's spirits after a full day of classroom drama.

Apolline began to escort Minerva to the veranda. Gabby should be arriving in a few minutes and they may as well stay in the garden as not to waste Minerva's time.

"I must ask..." Minerva spoke up. "Have you found time to buy a new replacement wand or will she be working with a family heirloom this time?"

"She's refused outright to be fit for a new one." Apolline replied. "We have a dozen family wands to offer... and then there is Harry's suggestion."

"Harry's suggestion, dear?"

"With your previous employer responsible for taking Gabrielle's treasure away from her, Harry believes she should get to keep Dumbledore's wand hostage until a 'prisoner exchange' can be

agreed to. If Little Angel has his wand anyway, we might as well see if she can use it."

"I suppose." Minerva didn't sound convinced. "There really is only one way to find out."

What perfect timing. A little angel in light blue appeared near the other end of the veranda.

"Welcome home Little Angel." Apolline called to her youngest.

"Momma!" Gabby ran to her mother and got a mandatory home-from-school hug. Harry materialized behind the girl.

"Auntie Apolline." Harry waved. "And Professor McGonagall! So nice to see you again!"

Minerva was quite shocked when the ghost took her hand and kissed her knuckles. If only he knew how many times his own father pulled that stunt trying to escape a detention or three...

"What a charmer you've become, Mister Potter. It's a pity Myrtle isn't in the habit of interacting with the living as much as you, young man. Who knows where she'd be today if she did."

Harry missed the 'young man' remark after hearing Myrtle's name.

"I do owe her a visit, don't I?"

"What in Merlin's name are you talking about, Harry? If I were you, I'd stay well clear of the castle. Why, I'm not you and I'm still staying well clear."

Both Delacour's were listening in now.

"Before leaving Hogwarts on the night of the Third Task, I promised Myrtle that I'd visit with her every time I was in the neighborhood. Well, I've been to Hogwarts once already since then and I didn't quite make it to her bathroom so I owe her one."

"Harry! You can't be serious!"

"I'm sorry Auntie, but a promise is a promise."

"You can't go when I'm sleeping!"

Seeing Harry kiss her tutor's hand gave Gabby an idea. She tried to hug Harry... the first honest attempt since Third Task... only to fall through again. It tickled this time too.

"Of course not, Angel. Wouldn't dream of leaving you alone like that."

"Good." The little Veela turned to Minerva. "Good afternoon, Misses McGonagall."

"Good afternoon to you as well, Miss Delacour. I have been informed that you are once again ready to study wand magics. Is that so?"

Gabby nodded quickly. She really did miss it too much to wait for her Harry wand to come back.

"Come here, Gabrielle." Her mother called. "I have the wands you may choose from."

Apolline stood next to a small outside table and unrolled a silk bundle. Twelve wands presented themselves... some smooth and elegant and some rough and weathered. Next to the right-most wand, Apolline placed the wand taken from Headmaster Dumbledore. Now her little angel had thirteen choices.

"I liked your wand better, Harry. These aren't as good as yours." Gabby bent low over the table and examined the wands, her nose nearly touching one or two of them.

"It can't be helped, Angel. Maybe we can have your mother put today's winner on a chain for you like Mione did mine."

"Not a gold chain! Only silver. These wands can't have a gold chain."

"Whatever you say, Angel."

"Pretty..." Gabby settled on a wand three in from the left. It had a nice spiral cut into the handle and a pink sapphire was mounted in

gold at the butt end. After getting her mother's permission to pick it up, she took the wand and turned it away from the veranda... just in case.

"Go on, Angel." Harry gave her a bit of encouragement.

Gabby took one last breath and gave the wand a flick.

"Well that was disappointing." Only a couple of sparks... and there was the tinkling of bells, but it was almost too quiet to hear.

"Try another, Gabrielle. You have twelve more to pick from." Apolline instructed.

Gabby got the same results with two more wands that she thought were also pretty. The first 'cute' wand released a mist and tinkling bell sounds, but no sparks appeared. Gabby wanted to rule that one out, but her mother set it to one side just in case. She pointed out that the reaction was about as good as she remembered Fleur getting from her wand when the elder sister was eleven.

"Most of these are ugly, Momma. I don't want an ugly wand." Gabby made a sour face. Picking her next favorite was getting harder each time.

"We'll get your wand back some day, sweetheart, but until that day comes you need another wand to practice with."

"Ooookayyyyyyy." Gabby moaned.

The only other wand that wasn't ugly in her opinion was the one on the far right. If that one didn't work for her then there would be a fight to make her even pick up the others. She picked up Dumbledore's wand, not that she remembered it as being his, and turned once more to the open garden. Gabby looked back to her mother.

"This one feels cold, Momma. None of the others felt cold."

Her mother made a motion with her hands in response. 'Try anyway'. Gabby flicked her wrist.

This time, Gabby got a fountain of sparks, mist and noises just as she got from Harry's wand, but there were differences. The sparks were a mix of blue and silver that shot forward in a narrow beam. A thin wall of white mist rushed away from the wand as if riding a pressure wave. The noises... well they were entirely different. They were quite creepy, really.

"Did that wand just whisper?" Harry asked.

"Wands don't speak, Harry dear." Apolline responded. In truth, she didn't know what to think. "Gabrielle? Please try to cast a spell with it, will you?"

Gabby looked to her mother uncertainly. As Apolline nodded firmly, Minerva transfigured a candelabra with seven candles in front of the little Veela.

"We should go back to the basics, Miss Delacour. If you would please light the candle in the middle for me."

With two somewhat nervous adults and a nervous ghost watching, Gabby moved into her casting stance and held the wand aloft.

"Ignis cadesco."

Solid blue flame appeared. She lit the correct candle on her first try.

"Now the others, dear."

"Ignis cadesco."

Perhaps she misunderstood the request? The 'others' lit. All six of them at the same time and with the same exact strength.

"Nice one, Gabby!" Harry floated over to be next to the little girl. Sure, the wand was a bit scary, but it worked brilliantly.

"It's still cold, Momma." Gabby didn't seem as impressed with the wand. Harry's wand felt warm and inviting where as this one was anything but. Still, the sparks were very pretty, better by far than anything she got from the other wands sitting on the table before her.

"Don't worry, Gabby. We'll get it on a chain... and maybe we can have the back end wrapped like a sword hilt or something... I don't know. I think we have a winner, anyway." Harry began to run the tips of his fingers through her back, making Gabby giggle and forget how far away her Harry wand was right now.

"And now that we have that sorted out..." Minerva saw an opportunity to actually start the lesson and took it. "Perhaps you would like to try your hand at making wind, Miss Delacour. Air is one of the original elemental magical powers and closely related to fire. As such I do not believe this will be too difficult for you"

And so, for the first time since before her birthday, Gabrielle expanded her personal spell library by tweaking forces of nature.

-o\O/o-

"You asked for me, Alain?"

Alain looked up from his desk and nodded at the ghost before him. Harry appeared rather nervous as this was the first time Alain had requested him to come into his Ministry office unescorted. At least the lobby guards knew he was coming and were polite about holding Harry back until the wards could be adjusted to accommodate him.

"Yes, Harry. I'd like to ask you a few questions, questions I very much hope will not get back to Apolline or the girls."

Harry paused. "Have... have I done something wrong, sir?"

"Not at all, Harry. You have been a godsend to my family from the very beginning and you are not in any kind of trouble. What I have to talk to you today is about your home country... England."

"Have the English been doing something wrong then?"

"Can I trust that you will not tell the girls, Harry?"

"If that's what you want." Harry floated over to a chair and sat down. Even ghosts didn't like to stand during serious conversations.

"I have before me some newspapers, magazines and other documents that we have managed to sneak out of London recently.

Why don't you take a look?" Alain pushed a small stack of papers and parchments across the desk for Harry to see.

"That first one on the top is rather interesting for the cover story." Alain pointed to a magazine titled 'The Quibbler'. "So far it's the only story we've found in all of England that even remotely covers your fight with Dumbledore."

Surprised at the comment, Harry scanned over the magazine in question. It looked to be something that Harry expected to see in a Victorian museum display in quality of artwork and lettering, but the headline was quite odd.

ANGEL BATTLES ROTFANG CONSPIRACY

Alain continued as Harry picked up the periodical and began flipping through the pages.

"The publisher, one Xenophilius Lovegood, is known for publishing bizarre and fanciful stories... mostly conspiracy theories and imaginary creatures... but we're at a loss as to how he got so many details right this time." Alain began to organize a few of the other documents while Harry read through The Quibbler.

"It says here 'An Angel of the New Lord fought members of a secret high level Ministry cabal intent on usurping the Minister shortly before being stolen away by Chief Warlock Dumbledore who tried unsuccessfully to enslave her for his own nefarious purpose.' It's completely unbelievable yet absolutely true at the same time. Except for this 'New Lord' bloke... no idea what he's talking about."

Alain nodded. "We want to know how they got that much information in the first place. Mister Lovegood has a daughter in Hogwarts that just started her fourth year, but not much is known about the girl. Now look at this Prophet Article dated a few days after that Quibbler came out."

Harry picked up the newspaper and saw a picture of two wizards and one witch standing dejectedly before a Wizengamot court as the judge brings down the gavel repeatedly.

SEDITIONOUS SUBJECTS SENTENCED

"Malfoy shut the Quibbler down over this article?"

Harry supposed he shouldn't have been surprised. During his time as the Boy-Who-Lived, he never really noticed any other magical newspaper or magazine in his trips to Diagon Alley or to Hogsmeade. Harry knew only too well how much influence that damned paper had on English magicals and it didn't take much effort to see how the Ministry and Prophet worked together on some things. Harry knew that muggle media tended to favor one side over another and it was easy to see magicals doing the same thing.

"Not just shut them down, Harry. The editor and two part time writers are both in Azkaban. Ten year sentences each for crimes against the Ministry."

Alain paused while Harry read the Prophet article in question.

"If that wasn't bad enough, I see another article about Sirius gutting muggles in London... in Dark Lady Arc's name? If she were still around, I'd show her this one just to see her reaction." Harry continued to read as he muttered.

"What?" Alain still heard Harry's mutterings. "What do you mean, if she were still around?"

Harry took his eyes off the paper and turned to Alain. He looked more than a little guilty.

"Didn't I tell you? I suppose not..." The ghost boy took a moment to compose himself. "Jeanne... well... you won't be seeing anymore of her for a while. She, umn... she passed on."

"She did that hundreds of years ago, Harry."

"No, not really. You see- well, I'm not really sure how much I can say about it. It's a dead people kind of thing." Harry looked quite unsure of himself. No one told him how much of his extra-planar activities were secret and how much of them weren't. Harry was really policing himself on what he thought higher powers might want from him.

"Harry, please. What happened to Jeanne? All of France will want to know if something happened to her." Alain really couldn't take much more of this.

"Alright, alright." Harry held out his hands in a placating gesture. "She passed on passed on... as in actually went to Heaven or the Next Plane or wherever it is that people go once the way is opened for them."

Alain was speechless. Struck dumb with shock. Could have knocked him over with a feather.

"If it's any consolation, I don't think I've ever seen anyone so... well... at peace as she was right before she went on her way. I would say that I'm sorry to see her go, but that would be selfish of me. Jeanne's been waiting a very long time for this. In fact, I'm not sorry at all. It wasn't really fair for her to stick around so long, was it?"

"I..." Alain snapped back into the present. "I suppose not, Harry. You know that once word of this gets out, France will be inconsolable. Before Gabrielle's birthday, her passing would have been celebrated... she didn't really talk to anyone anyway... but since then, she's been much more approachable- and to suddenly disappear altogether? There will be those who don't believe she is gone. I hope I don't have to deal with anyone who believes you actually got rid of her somehow."

"Merlin, I hope not." Harry pushed down the thought that he actually did get rid of her in a manner of speaking.

"But I didn't ask you here to discuss Jeanne. There is more to England's troubles than a small battle or two." Alain spread the other documents on his desk out so that each of them could be seen in part. "These papers and parchments mean little individually, but together they point to a much bigger problem, Harry. This one mentions how a group of muggleborns was arrested for 'disorderly conduct'. This one here talks about a 'smuggling ring' with half-bloods and muggleborns. This one is about the Ministry purge of unreliable wizards and witches who- while all pureblood- were also all from traditionally light families. Those who actively fought against England's last Dark Lord are finding themselves unemployed while those who were suspected of fighting for him are filling the newly opened positions."

"I don't understand how this involves me, sir. I'm quite occupied here in France and I wouldn't be too welcome if I just showed up in the Minister's office and asked Malfoy to stop being such a prat."

Alain sat for a moment, tapping his finger nail on his desk and staring at Harry.

"I can only ask, Harry... this isn't an order and I won't think ill of you for refusing... but Depaul and I believe you can help France and in so doing you may also help England too."

"Depaul?"

"He's the Head of Foreign Affairs. Things are looking bad, Harry. This could turn into a real shooting war, not like those isolated attacks the English used to go after my family. We're talking about thousands of dead and wounded... French, English, others too. Germany won't let France go to war alone nor would Italy, Greece or any number of magically gifted nations. I'm not sure Dumbledore and Malfoy understand what a hornet's nest they're kicking up here on the continent by staging raids across the channel. We've already called two reserve divisions to active duty, Harry. Auror divisions may not be as large as their non-magical military counterparts, but at most the British have two companies of aurors to combat us with... maybe three."

Alain had Harry's full attention. This was not a pretty picture the French Department Head was painting.

"I still don't understand what I can do to help, sir."

"You have friends in Hogwarts, correct?" Harry nodded. "The Weasleys. Mister Diggory. Myrtle. I'm asking you to get in touch with these friends of yours in secret and... if they are willing... talk to them for me."

"You want me to be a spy? Like some kind of secret agent or something?"

"I don't want you to do anything you're not comfortable with. This is something you can't tell anyone else about, Harry. Not my wife... not Gabrielle, not Hermione... no one must know."

"Loose lips sink ships and all that."

"That's right. It's not ideal, I know. You will be at risk... actually going to Hogwarts quite often I imagine. Your friends could get in trouble too if they're found out but if you hear even one thing that can save a life or-"

"Or more than one. I get it, sir. Lives are at stake." Harry rose from the chair and began to float about the room in a close approximation of pacing. "A lot of lives are at stake."

"We have intelligence sources, but we don't have enough of them and not one inside of Scotland... inside of Hogwarts."

Harry stopped.

"I was going to go see Myrtle anyway. I'll just be more attentive... maybe see if she can't get word out that I'm around to talk every once in a while. Besides, Hogwarts is Dumbledore's territory. I doubt the Ministry can even touch him there."

Alain put down his trump card. "This year's Defense Professor was Ministry appointed since Dumbledore couldn't sign on someone fast enough. Dolores Umbridge."

Harry's eyes narrowed and his cheeks darkened considerably.

"That bitch is going to Hell if I have to take her there myself." There was a cold furry coming from Harry that Alain welcomed. He felt the same way.

-o\O/o-

Hogwarts was a cold, drafty castle but with warming charms and a few extra layers of clothing going out for a walk could still be worth it. The beauty of nature was hard for some to ignore and the privacy that came with it was highly valued in a castle full of nosy teens.

"Umbridge is such a slag!" Parvati Patil blurted out. "I mean, sure Ron is now solely responsible for putting us lions at the bottom of the house point race but if you could just see her ranting about Harry and Hermione right in front of him... she must know that he's the

only one here who was that close to them. She doesn't do it for your class, does she?"

Her sister Padma shook her head. "Not as much. She tells us to be quiet and read the book mostly. She's giving one of the Ravenclaw Fourth Years trouble though."

"Who?"

"Lovegood."

"I thought you didn't like her."

"She's an odd one, that's for sure, but she's completely harmless if you just ignore her like most of us do. Problem is, Luna's father was imprisoned for sedition and Umbridge is using that as an excuse to make an example of the girl at every opportunity."

"I think I saw her in the halls last night." Parvati furrowed her brow in concentration. "I'm sure of it now. You don't often tell a girl to go to the hospital wing on account of her bleeding arm only to hear her say a professor forbid her from seeking treatment."

"How can she get away with any of it? I've heard rumors about Flitwick and Sprout both going to Dumbledore with complaints and nothing seems to come of it."

"I could tell you if you really want to know."

Padma and Parvati stopped their stroll along the shores of Black Lake and nervously turned around.

"Malfoy. Why are you following us?" Parvati challenged.

"It's a beautiful afternoon, isn't it?" Draco smiled at both witches before nudging his companions. "Don't you think so?"

Vincent Crabbe nodded silently while Gregory Goyle grunted once.

"Are you feeling well, Malfoy? You do realize you're talking in a polite tone with a Gryffindor, don't you?" Parvati asked in response.

"Do I need to be sick to appreciate attractive witches?"

Padma began to look around for other students and Parvati moved her hand closer to her wand. Malfoy noticed.

"You've got the wrong idea, ladies." Draco turned to his hangers on and shooed them away. "You two are scaring the witches. Bugger off for a while."

Crabbe almost said that he liked looking at pretty witches too, but thought better of it and left with his partner in crime.

"Now it's two against one. Safer odds for you, right?"

"What do you want?" Parvati still didn't trust the boy. She doubted any Gryffindor in the castle ever would.

"While I can't have Professor Umbridge removed from the castle even with my father being the current Minister for Magic, I can solve half of the Umbridge problem for those of you in the student population that want more than half a chance of passing O.W.L.s and N.E.W.T.s come summer."

This was a huge issue in the Ravenclaw dorms. In-house study sessions could only take one so far without a professor involved and Flitwick had enough work to do with his own subject. Padma bit. "Go on."

Malfoy projected as much smug confidence as he could muster. That was quite a bit.

"I'm sure you two remember the failed dueling club that Professor Lockheart tried to get going?" Both witches nodded. "I've convinced my Head of House that it's time to resurrect it."

"Umbridge won't like that, will she? She seems repulsed by the idea of actually teaching her students things they need to know." Padma countered.

Draco only smiled wider. "That's why we won't be calling it a 'dueling club'. Professor Snape has submitted plans for the new Magical Traditions club! He's making it out to be the exact opposite of Muggle Studies with lessons in etiquette, pureblood customs and Ministry function."

"Doesn't sound like there will be much dueling involved..." Parvati started only to hand the sentence off to her sister, "...just things we're already well acquainted with."

"By keeping it a student run club sponsored by Professor Snape, we can duel as much as we want and Umbridge won't learn about it. Any mud- sorry... any muggleborn or half-blood who wants to join will just have to complete the etiquette and customs lessons before they get to duel with the rest of us... if you don't know why you're dueling then there's no honor in it."

"You? Letting muggleborns into your club? Not calling them 'mudblood'? I think you just might be delirious after all." Parvati was ready to leave... if only Padma didn't seem so tempted by the dueling aspect of it all.

"We should let Madam Pomfrey be the judge of that." Draco actually smiled at Parvati. "In the mean time, the both of you should make room in your busy schedules for my Magical Traditions Club soon. I promise not to kick you out of the club even after your rude behavior this afternoon."

With that, Draco bowed, turned and sauntered away.

"Something's not quite right here." Parvati told her sister. "I don't trust him."

"We can go to the first meeting, right? See if he's serious or not." Padma feared for her O.W.L.s this year with Umbridge's un-teaching. "I think the proof will be in the pudding... if he really does let muggleborns in the club or not."

Parvati conceded the point and re-started their walk.

-o\O/o-

Gabby's new wand may be not have given her the warmth and confidence her Harry wand gave her, but it sure worked good.

With a grunt and a shove, the very wind bent to Gabby's command. A slide here and a twist there made half the flowers in bloom lose petals to a pastel tornado rising out of the garden and into the sky.

"Gabrielle! Please restrain yourself!" Minerva had to shout to be heard over howling winds and laughter.

Gabby pouted, but she also released her hold on the vapors above. The winds stopped.

"Pretty!" Without any wind to hold them aloft, all of the delicate flower petals which were twisting through the air succumbed to gravity once more and began to rain down upon the little Veela and her companion.

"Miss Delacour, the petals are very pretty but we are trying to learn control. I would be much more impressed by your magic if it could make just one petal dance about in a slow circle than all of them zip around in a cyclone."

"Yes, Misses McGonagall. I promise to do better next time Misses McGonagall." Gabby tried to look penitent, but she just couldn't get rid of the bright smile she got from making a flower shower.

Suddenly, Little Angel's smile doubled in intensity. Warmth and love filled her from the inside out.

Harry's back! She called. Harry! Harry! Come out and play!

As Minerva recovered from watching her student change from little Veela to little angel, a spirit she knew very well appeared between them.

"Hi, Gabby! Miss me?" Harry spread his arms wide.

Minerva's eyes nearly popped out of their sockets when Gabby jumped at Harry, wings spread wide, and the ghost actually caught her.

Gaaaaaah- tickles! She chirped excitedly. Quit it quit it quit it!

Harry stopped tickling his angel and set her down.

"If you two are quite finished..." Minerva had her hands on her hips. While the scene before her was very heartwarming, she was here for a purpose and she had a schedule to maintain.

"Sorry Professor McGonagall." Harry replied as Gabby parroted his actions losing her angelic nature as she did.

The lesson continued. For the next half-hour, Harry watched as the ex-Deputy Headmistress nudged Gabby along the way to proficiency in air magics. And as he watched, an idea began to form in the back of his mind and slowly began to build. Gabby was officially learning a charm or two today, but that didn't mean that her lesson couldn't be one in defense as well...

"Um, Professor?"

Minerva and Gabby both turned to see Harry holding up his hand.

"We are not in a classroom, Harry dear." She fought to keep the smirk from showing. "What is it?"

"These wind spells... Gabby can use them to push things around, right? Maybe she can use them on things that are moving too?"

"That's right, dear."

"So... could she maybe use them to stop solid objects from being thrown at her?"

Gabby watched curiously as her tutor and her Harry looked at each other. She didn't quite get what this was all about, but then grown-ups still did a lot of things she didn't understand.

"You mean things like magically binding ropes, Harry? That won't be easy."

"I want my Angel to be able to defend herself. I just want to make sure that the next time someone tries to trip her up, she'll have a way to get out of it." Harry looked out over the garden. "We can start easy... I see some small rocks that we can move around in front of her. Once she manages to swat them out of the air, we can move on to faster things and then things that are flying right at her."

Minerva seemed to consider things for a moment.

"While the lass shouldn't have to learn how to protect herself so soon, we do live in troubled times. Very well, Harry. If anything, this will cause Gabrielle to be even more skilled in her charms work."

The magic lesson continued. Mindful of his promise to Hermione, Harry paid close attention to Minerva's instructions. He may not be able to wield a wand himself but there's no telling what bit of knowledge will mean the difference between life and death for Gabby years down the road. Harry briefly wondered what would have happened to him in the Chamber of Secrets if Hermione hadn't identified the monster. Death by deadly glare, he imagined, and his ghostly existence may have started two full years earlier than it did.

-o\O/o-

A heavy wooden door opened and two young witches walked through.

"Just a few more steps... come on, you can make it..."

A strawberry blonde with a yellow and black tie carefully held up her shaking and pale companion. After staggering over to a sink, the healthier girl turned the sink's knobs to get some water flowing.

"You need to wash it off Luna. Here, let me help you." Susan took Luna's blood covered hand and held it under the cool running water.

"Oooh, visitors!"

Susan heard another girl's voice behind her but ignored it for now. Her detentions ended a week ago but Professor Umbridge has piled up a never ending string of detentions for the frail Ravenclaw next to her.

"Hasn't she done enough to you already? I swear, Luna, I'll find some way to get back at her for what she's doing." Susan voice almost broke. Being Professor Umbridge's personal chew toy was bad enough for a Hufflepuff with dozens of friends; she couldn't imagine how hard it must be for the loneliest girl in Ravenclaw Tower.

"Dear me, look at all that blood- and your friend is almost as pale as I am!"

"Shut it, Myrtle. Can't you see how bad off she is?" Susan still didn't look up from her work. They were almost out of dittany and she didn't think there was any more in all of the Hufflepuff dorms.

"That's what the Hospital Wing is for. There's no medwitch to be found in the toilets in case you haven't noticed."

"Umbridge forbade Luna from going to Madam Pomfrey! As High Inquisitor, she has that power!"

"Oh, well... in that case, Luna, if you die here, I'll let you share my bathroom. Plenty of room, really, and very quiet except on nights when Harry Potter shows up."

Susan almost forgot Luna for a moment. "What do you mean, 'nights when Harry Potter shows up'?"

Myrtle looked away from the two living witches and pointed a finger to one side. Both Susan and Luna looked up to see a very embarrassed looking ghost looking back at them. A boy ghost.

"Er, sorry. I'll come back later if this is a bad time." Harry said.

"No problem at all, Harry." Myrtle called out. "Look! We could be getting a new sister soon!"

"What?" Harry followed Myrtle's gaze to the dirty blonde who was leaning heavily on a sink with one hand and holding the other under a running tap. "Merlin, what happened to you?"

"Professor Umbridge happened and no, she's not allowed to go to Pomfrey for treatment."

Susan started last summer by believing every article in the Prophet that belittled Harry, the Delacours and Hermione, but things changed. When her aunt was kicked out of the Ministry, the Prophet's ire was turned onto the Bones family for a time. Now Susan understood what a load of rubbish that paper can be.

"I've already asked for help from everyone in Hufflepuff and the whole House is out of dittany now."

"Susan, right?" The witch nodded. "What about Ravenclaw, then?" Harry was wondering why Luna wasn't here with someone from her own house.

"Luna isn't very popular over there. They call her Loony... and Chang got the entire House to cut ties with Hufflepuff over Cedric. If a puff asks another claw to help Luna, they'll just be that much worse to her."

"And to think I fancied Cho at one point. Guess she's just a pretty face after all."

"Can- can I quote you on that, Harry Potter?" Luna spoke up for the first time.

"Quote me?"

"Yes. They took Father's press, but I'm keen to start a student paper. People will want to know if Professor Umbridge succeeds in evacuating the school of flibbertigibbits as she intends. I find her efforts amusing as she should be looking for wrackspurts instead."

"Now there's one witch I wouldn't mind giving to the muggles for an old fashioned burning. Sure, Luna. You can quote me." Harry took a closer look at Luna. "What happened to your hand?"

"Blood quills." Susan supplied. "They write with the blood of the person wielding them. It's illegal to use them as anything other than a will or contract sealing tool, but that hasn't stopped Umbridge. The Ministry's behind her now anyway."

Harry smiled mischeviously. "Would you ladies be willing to accept help from servants of 'Dark Lady d'Arc'?"

"There isn't a Dark Lady of Arc, is there?" Susan sounded uncertain though Luna shook her head at the question.

"Of course not. Jeanne's a wonderful girl and quite handy in a fight, let me tell you... but that's for later. Luna needs help and you should know by now that I just can't resist a damsel in distress. Will you accept my help?"

"You can save me any time, Harry Potter." Luna's smile seemed a bit forced, but then her wrist was still bleeding openly. Who knows how long she could last like that.

"Thank you, Luna. I think I will." The Boy-Who-Lived-And-Then-Didn't bowed to Miss Lovegood before calling out one word. "Dobby!"

POP

"Does Mister Harry Potter Sir need Dobby? Dobby is here!" The energetic house-elf began hopping from one foot to the other. "What is Harry Potter Sir doing here in Hoggy Warts? Castle is too dangerous for Harry Potter Sir!"

Harry floated down to Dobby's eye level.

"Hoggy Warts is too dangerous for a lot of people, Dobby, but some of them can't leave like I can. Will you get some potions and bandages for my friend Luna's hand? She lost a lot of blood and needs that wrist bandaged up." Dobby looked over to the witch in question but Harry continued before the elf could reply. "I need this to be done quietly, Dobby. We don't want Umbridge to learn that Luna's getting help and Dumbledore can't know I'm here!"

Dobby bowed quietly and POP'ed away.

"Why don't you want Dumbledore to know, Harry? He's the Leader of the Lig-"

"He's doing a bloody poor job of it, Susan." The witch flinched back at Harry's harsh tone. "I'm sorry to tell you this, but Albus Dumbledore is a rotten bastard. He tried to kidnap Gabby and make her live in Hogwarts Castle. The old fossil claimed she'd be safer with him than with her own parents, never mind that her father controls all the aurors throughout all of France."

POP

"Dobby had potions for Harry Potter's Loony!"

Harry saw Susan flinch at the term and he also saw Luna look down to her feet.

"Dobby, I think you're going to need another name to call her by. Luna. Is your last name Lovegood, by chance?" Luna nodded. Harry looked back to the elf. "Could you call her Miss Lovegood instead?"

Dobby bowed and scraped as much as he could without dropping his medical supplies. "Dobby is very, very sorry Harry Potter Sir's Missy Lovegood. Dobby won't say the bad name again!"

Harry reached around the groveling elf to pluck a stoppered vial out of his grasp. As Luna began to smile and Susan goggled at Harry's ability to pick up solid objects, Harry examined the potion inside.

"This one's a blood-replenishing potion, isn't it?" Dobby nodded so hard that Harry half expected the elf's head to fall off. "Looks like all that time in the Hospital Wing was worth something after all. Brilliant, Dobby. This is good stuff."

Luna's smile was getting brighter as Harry floated to within arm's reach of her. "Well, Harry Potter Sir's Missy Lovegood... I am Doctor Harry Potter Sir, and you, young lady, are in need of some medicine."

As Harry began to provide proper medical care to his patient, Myrtle slid around the group to take a closer look.

"Harry, luv. Not that we don't all appreciate it but this maiden-rescuing hobby of yours is really going to get you in trouble one day."

Harry's snort caused him to spill a few drops of potion down Luna's cheek. As he turned to see what else Dobby brought with him, Harry commented over his shoulder.

"You've got the timing all wrong, Myrtle. I get into trouble, then I find myself in great peril... then its maiden saving time and then back to being just in trouble again. You see? By the time I'm maiden saving like I am right now, the hard part's already done."

Over the next hour, Harry treated Luna's wounds, both physical and emotional, as best he could and talked about the simple, everyday things that made this year different than last. Gryffindor's house point score was a travesty now that two professors actively attacked

them and the ex-deputy headmistress's replacement was less influential than she had been. Cedric was in the middle of a struggle for student leadership of the school. He started the year as Head Boy but High Inquisitor Umbridge stripped him of the title after Cedric made one too many open comments against the Ministry's position on France. Chang is now dating the Slytherin that became Head Boy in his place and not a week goes by that Chang doesn't start a massive row about Cedric's relationship with the French Veela Champion. Most surprising of all was Malfoy.

"What do you mean, 'he's not a prat anymore'?" Harry felt like he was in some bizarre alternate world where things were not as they should be.

"He's not!" Susan countered. "He doesn't insult muggleborns anymore, he doesn't bully the other houses (though that's not to say that other Slytherins won't) and he actually apologized for how he always treated you and Hermione in the past. Out in front of other students and everything!"

"It's true, Harry. Draco got rid of his wrackspurts... all of them." Luna added as she used her wand to cycle through wrist bandage colors looking for just the right shades of neon lime-orange and fuchsia. "He's not a snake trapped in the body of a lion anymore... more like a snake wearing the pelt of a badger. I'm not sure if he trapped and skinned a badger to get the pelt or if he just paid for it though."

Harry didn't know what to think of either witch's comments so far, so he just tried to remember the overall message.

"I just can't believe that he's not a prat anymore."

-o\O/o-

A light snow was falling.

Tens of thousands of little white flakes were drifting steadily to the ground and passing in and out of streetlights along a silent town square. Light from those streetlights and the last business to remain open at this late hour cut just far enough into the night to reveal the silhouettes of a half dozen figures as they trudged through the fresh snow.

The group passed an old war memorial, a pair of old German armored vehicles which made it into town one day long ago and never left. The first one, a self propelled assault gun, sat proudly in the center of the square looking as dangerous as ever... if one didn't notice several long irregular gashes in the machine's armor plate. The second war relic was a tank, one with a short barreled gun which back in its day was better for knocking down buildings than for smashing other tanks. While the cloaked figures passing through paid it no mind, any normal tourist would have gaped in astonishment at the full scale bronze dragon perched on top of the tank. The enshrined scaly beast had its head inside the tank as it clamped down on the turret with both forearms. This must be a memorial to one of the countless untold battles that raged in the early forties that never made its way into official modern histories. After all, who would believe that a Russian company was saved from destruction one cold winter day when a hungry dragon swooped down from the nearby mountains and ate all of the attacking Germans?

This was no ordinary town.

The six figures who passed silently by the bronze dragon all congregated in front of one illuminated door. The door was on the side of a two story building facing the town square and marked with a dirty backlit sign. In Cyrillic, the sign simply read 'Three Sisters – Veela and Spirits'.

No wonder it was still open.

"What did you just say again?" Segolene yelled over the music.

She sat at a table with one local wizard and another foreign witch, an American.

"This temple complex you two are looking for... I think I may have been there once or twice already!"

The witch had been introduced to Fleur and Segolene mere hours ago as an expert in the fields of non-magical archeology and magical cursebreaking. Kind of a family business.

"Really, Miss Jones?"

"Yeah! Grandad was taking Dad and me on a tour of the older sites that Great-Grandad spent most of his life on. The temple you're looking for was run over with a fine tooth comb by mundanes in the thirties. They found some unexplained demonic imagery and a hint of angel worship but nothing more."

Marion Jones took another sip of her wine.

"At the time, I was only a student... not even out of Salem yet so I couldn't have done any real curse breaking and the goblins have never gone after anything in this part of the world to my knowledge."

Segolene knew this was the right witch to help them. With any luck, they could get her to agree to a magically binding oath favoring Veela secrecy. If not, both she and Fleur were good enough with the Obliviate spell that Marion could be released without risk. Time to get a little more friendly to help break the ice.

"You said Grandad Jones was a cursebreaker, but he was also muggle?"

Marion nodded. "We call 'em mudanes back in the States, but sure. He had the damndest luck too. Grandad could pass magical traps with a mix of straight research and sheer luck. When Dad took Mom, a pureblood from the Carolinas, to meet his parents, they figured out she was a witch pretty quick. Grandad kept saying 'I knew it, I knew it' like he had just found the Holy Grail again, or so Dad says."

"Again?"

"Again."

"Last Call!" One of three Veela sisters who ran the pub shouted in the local dialect.

The three sisters were Fleur and Segolene's hosts for this leg of their research trip as they were the closest established Veela family to the ruins in question. One of them was on stage showing Fleur how to do local traditional dances. This also meant that Fleur was learning how to boil the blood of the local men who tonight seemed to be a mix of traditional magicals and Ukrainian military personnel. Wands were out in full view yet so were assault rifles and even a few pistols. The detachment's commander used his own wand to

levitate a vodka bottle and serve his men drinks. One of the sisters was impressed enough at the demonstration to drop into his lap and engage the warrior-wizard in a heated kiss.

The door opened allowing cold air to push through and disturb many of the tabletop lamps.

As Segolene shared a drink with Marion and her local translator and Fleur danced with another Veela to the delight of most men present, the third sister tried in vain to pull her skirt down low enough to protect herself from the cold draft as she cleaned off a table near the door. She did not see the portkey coming until it was too late.

Still hardly noticed by any who weren't too drunk to do anything about it, the first cloaked figure in a group of six that just entered the pub raised his wand and cast.

Segolene saw the bright red spell out of the corner of her eye but could do nothing more than go for her own wand just as her companions were doing. She did not see the dull metallic object arcing towards her forehead.

A wave of magic sped through a patch of space that held Fleur only moments before and struck one of the musicians who immediately fell to the ground.

Suddenly shouts filled the air, followed by more spells which now traveled both into pub patrons and into the cloaked attackers. Then gunfire.

The chatter of automatic weapons drowned out all other noise as soldiers sought to avenge their commander after he and his lap-Veela were both dowsed in magical acid which was even now dissolving the skin off of their faces.

The last local Veela saw what became of her sister and screamed in fury. Then she changed. Soon balls of hot orange magical fire began to pummel the still unknown attackers.

As their initial advantage was lost, the cloaked attackers began to retreat through the front door. One made the mistake of dropping his shield spell as he turned for the door and caught two exploding hexes in the side, killing him instantly. Another turned to assume the

position of rear guard only to catch a spread of high powered rifle rounds in the face, one place his enchanted bullet proof cloak did not protect him. Two down.

Four men began to run through the darkness towards a known apparition-portkey point between the two silent German machines. From the doorway, a lance of orange fire leapt from the hands of the last standing Veela sister and slammed into the back of one man, knocking him to the ground and setting him on fire. Another fell as bullets began to pour out of a broken window and into his legs.

-pop- -pop-

Two of the original six made it back to their extraction point and escaped. Fucking soldiers... they were supposed to be on duty tonight and not out partying with the Veela that these men were hired to trap for the international market.

"Segolene. Segolene! Where are you!"

After the harsh barks of gunfire ceased, Fleur scanned the pub for her closest, dearest friend. She wasn't at the table she started in though Marion and her companion were still alive and kicking, nor was she in the kitchen or near the dance floor.

"Segolene!"

As Fleur became more and more desperate for a response, those who survived the fight to chase out the attackers circled two men still on the ground and breathing. Locals were fond of their Veela and respectful of Veela foreign guests, but that didn't mean they were light wizards strictly speaking. These two men were going to talk quickly... or they were going to die very slowly.

End Chapter

Chapter Fourteen: Deliver Us from Evil

December 7th, 1995

The morning was cold and overcast, not that such a thing was unusual for the village of Hogsmeade. What made this morning so unusual was how the students of Hogwarts seemed to mirror the subdued weather as they flooded town on the first Hogsmeade Weekend of the school year. In recent years, students were known to fill the streets and shops with a celebratory atmosphere; getting out from under the influence of the school staff always meant being able to ignore many of the rules that kept students in line on school grounds even if some rules of conduct were still loosely enforced.

There was no party this year. This is not to say that students weren't relaxing and letting off steam during their stay in the village, as that was the whole reason to go. No, things were different this time because the pressures felt by students of Hogwarts were still present in Hogsmeade as well. The Ministry of Magic was ever present.

Within the school, Professor Umbridge was, sadly, having no trouble at all assembling a web of spies and snitches who would scour the school for rule breakers and report rumor as fact. It also became quite clear that High Inquisitor Umbridge felt it was her right to police student post. Students received detentions not only for what they wrote to family and friends outside of school but also for what was written back. Several valuable owl order packages and family care boxes were detained indefinitely so that Dolores could 'inspect them for dark magics'.

Outside of the school, low level DMLE officials mixed with Hogsmeade residents. While officials loitered in dark corners, village residents tended to move quickly from one building to another without giving their children any time to play on the streets in between. No young mother wanted to be pounced upon by the deranged murderer Sirius Black nor did they want to be taken in for questioning about rumored ties to supposed dark wizards. There were rumors about 'questioning techniques' that rivaled the Sirius Black stories for the fear they generated. The DMLE wizards on patrol were never actual aurors. Or trustworthy looking. In fact, most of the DMLE officials hanging about were rough and scraggly

looking enough that no young witch wanted to accept a portkey from them no matter how shiny their badge was.

"Sooo... He said he would be back again, did he?" A young wizard called out between two witches as they weaved in and out of the student traffic.

The witches were both at least a head shorter than the seventh year Hufflepuff and Triwizard Champion. The one on his right nodded.

"He's keen to keep up with things. I mean, sure the Friar will talk to puffs whenever we have a question but he never seems to know who you are aside from the fact that you are one of his. Myrtle, well she's really not as bad as I was led to believe... but-" Susan Bones turned to see what other students may be close enough to hear their little chat, "Harry's different. He cares. He helped with Luna."

"It's true." The young Ravenclaw commented from Cedric's left. "I can now see why Ginny always wanted to play Marry Harry Potter when we were little. Do you think Harry would play it with me next time? I think he'd look rather fetching in white dress robes with a full veil and train, don't you? If only he weren't so pale."

"If so, I want to be Best Man." Susan added.

"Does that make me the priest or the Maid of Honor?" Ced shot back with a grin. Luna was actually quite a fun little witch when you got to know her.

"Father of the Bride. I think Harry would want you to give him away." Luna looked off into the distance. "Don't worry, Sir. I'll take good care of your daughter. He's been very kind to me."

Ced felt the conversation turn serious again. "So I've heard."

The three found themselves standing in line to get inside the Three Broomsticks. Subdued or not, everyone wanted a bit of butterbeer and a chance to get warm inside. If there is a pub nearby in the winter, all of a sudden everyone forgets how magic works. Odd, that. It looked like there was even a small wait just to get in the door today. They joined the cue of students and locals standing at the door.

"He has. He even told me that I can quote him in my paper."

"Are you sure that's a good idea?" There were a lot of suspicious people about that Ced could see. "That's not really the kind of thing you want-"

"What was it Harry said about Professor Umbridge? He said, 'Now there's one witch I wouldn't mind giving to the muggles for an old fashioned burning.'" Luna rattled off before either of her companions could silence her.

"Eh? What was that, you said?" A gravelly voice called from behind the trio.

"That Cedric would be a good Father of the Bride or that Dolores should be given to the muggles for an old fashioned burning?"

As Luna finished her sentence, Susan and Cedric both felt a heavy weight settle in their stomachs. Luna felt a heavy weight settle on her shoulder.

"Right. You're coming with me, Miss." Said a man of average build and common features. There was a shiny DMLE badge on his breast pocket.

Susan took a step back in fear. Cedric tried to get a foot between Luna and the man holding her.

"Pardon my friend, Sir. She didn't really mean it, you know... she's a sweet girl but she says the strangest things." Ced tried to get a little closer to the man as a show of hiding it from Luna. "They call her Loony behind her back. Ask anyone."

The man seemed to consider Cedric's words. A few students listening in saw their chance to insult her in public and went for it.

"She's loony alright."

"... a right nutter, that one..."

"... spends most of her time looking for nargles and wrackspurts whatever those are. Honestly."

Never was Susan happier with Luna's reputation than she was right then. The plain robes constable seemed to be loosening his grip on the blonde.

"Then again, she is Lovegood's daughter..."

"...and with dear old Daddy in Azkaban for sedition, why, she would certainly be unhappy with the Minister's Under-Secretary, wouldn't she?"

The man's grip tightened enough that Ced and Susan both saw Luna flinch. Damn Slytherins! Susan put some effort into memorizing two faces for the next time she saw them. Cedric had one last card to play.

"Look, Sir... I'm Cedric Diggory. You know... Triwizard Champion? My father's pretty high up in the Ministry and all and well..." This had to work. "If you just let her go if she promises to be a good witch from now on, I could owe you a favor. A big one. What do you say?"

The magical constable thought about it for a minute... almost seemed to be on the verge of taking the favor over the girl when someone else interrupted.

"I wouldn't trust anything he says, Sir." A soft, sweet voice with a Scottish lilt to it. Cho. "Everyone knows Cedric's just a mindless shill since that Veela bitch warped him with her thrall. He was a guest at the Delacour family over the summer for Merlin's sake!"

The man's grip tightened once more causing Luna to whimper as his fingers dug into her delicate shoulder. He glared at Cedric.

"Thought you'd get over on me, eh? I'll be looking into you, boy. You bess keep your wits about you or you'll be following the little miss here to a bad place. Understand?"

He turned away from Cedric and pulled a chain away from his neck with his free hand. As soon as he had the chain pressed into Luna's tear stained cheek, he called out a single word and the two disappeared.

Cedric slowly closed his eyes and took a few deep breaths. Susan stepped closer and put a hand on his shoulder. Cho couldn't let a sleeping dog lie.

"I was hoping he would take you along with Loony. Oh, well. There will be a party in Ravenclaw Tower tonight now that we finally got rid of her." Cho was twisting the knife... and everyone staring between the Triwizard Champion and his ex-girl could see Cedric's face purple at her barb.

"Cho?"

Cedric's call was soft and measured. He began to turn around, scanning the crowd as he went.

"What?"

There were about two dozen students, some from every house far as he could tell, but there were no adults present.

-CRACK-

Cedric's fist plowed into the surprised witch's face and knocked her to the ground. She didn't get back up.

"You are such a fucking bitch."

"Cedric!" Susan stepped up to her housemate. "You're going to get in so much trouble for that!"

Three Ravenclaws were alternately glaring at Cedric and trying to get their limited healing skills to do some good for Cho. The two Slytherin students already went off to find a Professor.

"She deserved it. Hufflepuff would never do that to one of their own. Buzzardclaw is what they really are." He turned and began walking back to the trail to Hogwarts.

"Where are you going?" Susan asked as she tried to match his pace.

"Headmaster's Office." Cedric replied. "Headmaster Dumbledore will want to know that one of his students has been taken by a Ministry official."

-o\O/o-

"Sit down, Mister Diggory. Miss Bones." Albus Dumbledore's voice rang out.

Two students entered the Headmaster's office and took seats at the head of an oval shaped table which seemed to expand as they approached. Two chairs appeared at the near end.

Cedric, feeling the gazes of every person in the room, fell into a more formal attitude than normal and held Susan's chair out for her. He received a soft 'thank you' in return. Perhaps if the situation weren't so serious, Susan may have blushed at the attention of the upperclassman. Back held straight, the Triwizard Champion sat down and returned the gazes of everyone else in the room in turn.

Albus Dumbledore sat at the head of the table as was his right as Headmaster. To either side, Deputy Headmaster Snape and High Inquisitor Umbridge both sent the Seventh Year stern glares. To Snape's right sat Professors Flitwick and Sprout, no doubt acting in their official capacities as Head of House for Ravenclaw and Hufflepuff. Opposite the two Heads was a line of students, two Slytherins and three Ravenclaws. Cedric and Susan both recognized all five from the incident in Hogsmeade. Cedric and Susan were seated directly opposite the Headmaster.

"I'd like to begin..." Albus spoke, "By informing everyone that Miss Chang is recovering quickly and will be out of Madam Pomfrey's care before curfew tonight."

Albus looked down the table to the five students sitting as witnesses.

"For quickly finding a professor to deal with the situation and for immediate wound care on Miss Chang at the time of the incident, I give five house points to each of you. Well done..." Albus turned to look at Cedric, and as he did all five of the non-puff teens in the room turned in anticipation. "Mister Diggory. I find myself quite saddened by what transpired earlier today. You have been a student leader here at Hogwarts, a role model for many younger students- I daresay a role model for younger students in more than one house..."

"Not in Ravenclaw ." A quick glare by Flitwick silenced the wizard from his house that dared speak out of turn.

"As I was saying," Albus continued. "The whole school now knows that you have physically assaulted a fellow student, a witch at that, who was not in a position to defend herself. Before punishment is pronounced, I would like to hear if you have anything to say for yourself."

Cedric briefly glanced down and marshaled his thoughts. Striking Cho was wrong... he knew that... but after her own actions she needed some form of punishment and he knew she'd get none of it from anyone in this room. He did feel guilty about setting a bad example for his own housemates... perhaps Gryffindor as well. He had his own reasons for not caring about the others. Still, as long as he could be seen as defending Luna then he would accept responsibility for his own actions.

He stood up before responding.

"I am not proud of striking a witch. It is something that is not considered acceptable in my father's house nor in my house here in Hogwarts." He took a breath in. "My actions were purely a result of emotions running high after Miss Chang did something that I considered a great personal offense, something that would be considered a cardinal sin within Hufflepuff had Miss Chang been one of us."

"I don't like hearing about discord in my own house, young man, but I fail to see how a single insult merits your assault." Professor Flitwick responded.

Cedric was confused and it showed.

"You think this is only about one insult? What about Luna? She was arrested earlier today do in no small part to Cho's actions." Cedric turned to the Headmaster. "Sir. Did you get in touch with the DMLE? I'd like to submit myself as a witness in her defense."

Flitwick started at that declaration and looked at Albus. "This is the first I've heard of it... and why have I not been informed that one of my students is in Ministry custody?"

Before Albus could explain, he was pre-empted by the High Inquisitor. "I have already established to my satisfaction that no such arrest was made. Obviously you are just desperate to lay blame for your dishonor elsewhere."

Cedric held his tongue and stared at his Headmaster. Surely the Chief Warlock has enough influence to uncover the truth.

"I am afraid, Mister Diggory, that Madam Umbridge is correct. My contacts within the Ministry have also failed to find any trace of Miss Lovegood within DMLE records today. I have only recently established that she has indeed failed to return to the Castle since being released for Hogsmeade earlier in the day." Albus did look troubled at this point. Whatever the true reason, he was short a student.

Susan spoke up in defense of Cedric. "I was there! I saw the man take Luna and I saw his badge!"

"Lies." Dolores gound out.

"I've seen hundreds of Ministry badges over the years on account of my Aunt Amelia... and... oh! He had a Ministry portkey necklace too! I'll swear to what I saw!"

"Be silent Miss Bones! We have already heard from sufficient witnesses. Witnesses who have no recollection of this imaginary official of whom you speak..." Dolores shared a meaningful glance with the five non-Hufflepuff students at the table. They wouldn't be crossing her tonight, not that they intended to.

Cedric couldn't let this farce continue. "Not just these five I hope. There was more than twen-"

"Silence!" Dolores stood up in challenge to Cedric, not that he wasn't still two heads taller than the toad of a woman. "I think we've heard quite enough from the two of you!"

"Madam Umbridge, as the Headmaster of this school, it is my responsibility to see that students are both properly punished and given a chance to fully explain their actions before punishments are decided upon. If there is any further evidence to review, then we must gather it before continuing."

Albus put some real weight behind his words. Cedric sat immediately and every other student in the room flinched visibly. Even Snape turned to look the other way, however briefly. Despite feeling the Headmaster's power as much as anyone else, Dolores rallied.

"Hem-hem." The High Inquisitor of Hogwarts wore a mask of superiority. "In accordance with Educational Decree Number Twenty-five, as signed by our beloved Minister Malfoy, I have the authority to overrule any disciplinary decisions given by other members of the staff. Since it is obvious that you do not intend to prosecute these shameful actions to the fullest extent possible, I shall do it for you."

Dolores looked at the Seventh Year wizard, who for the first time had his hands beneath the table, and made her pronouncement.

"Cedric Diggory... in acknowledgment of not only the shameful attack perpetrated on a witch who is completely without fault... and in acknowledgment of your constant and unrelenting unpatriotic stance against the Ministry of Magic, I hereby expel you from Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry." Several gasps of surprise were heard, even from the students present who wanted to see Cedric get raked over the coals for hitting Cho. "I'll be taking your wand, Mister Diggory."

He knew this was coming as soon as the toad cut off Susan. He was ready.

"No, don't worry about it, Headmaster."

Cedric held up one hand in acceptance in a bid to stop Albus from interfering as he appeared to be on the verge of doing. He then pulled his wand out from its place in his lap and snapped it for all to see. After tossing the pieces onto the table, he turned to Professor Flitwick.

"Please look further into Miss Lovegood's condition, Sir. Unfortunately, I must retract my earlier apology. The next time I see Cho, I'm quite likely to strike her a second time."

As another round of gasps filled the room, Cedric turned to the Deputy Headmaster. "You may be a master at mixing potions but you are absolute shite as a professor."

"Mister Diggory!" Albus called.

"I'm going!" As he turned to leave, Cedric's eyes lingered over his own Head of- no... ex-Head of House. "Sorry."

Cedric wasted no more time. He made for the office door which opened without prompting at his approach.

Unable to stand the immediate silence and still reeling from watching her housemate get politically assassinated just as her own Aunt was before, Susan leapt out of her seat and gripped her wand with both hands.

"You're about to expel me too, aren't you slag?" The Fifth Year Hufflepuff witch shouted at Dolores.

The High Inquisitor's face changed from red to purple and a truly horrid glare burned into Susan's own fiery orbs. Whether or not Susan's question was really a self fulfilling prophecy, it was as good as confirmed.

Snap!

A second broken wand slid past the first on the long oval table as Susan spun on her heel and marched to the door. While Hufflepuff through and through, that was probably the most Gryffindor thing she'd ever done.

"Harry was right about you, Dumbledore! He was right!"

Without another glance back, Susan shot out of the office. Ignorant of the argument that was about to ignite behind her, Susan sprinted down the spiral stairs in search of her fellow ex-puff.

"Cedric!" Susan caught up to the young wizard shortly before reaching the first main stairwell leading back to Hufflepuff dorms and their belongings.

"Out so soon?" Cedric asked the witch. "Surely it would take longer for her to list your supposed crimes and punishments."

"I cut her off, snapped my wand and left."

Susan's response stopped him cold. "You what?"

"She was going to expel me anyway. I guess you inspired me or something and I snapped my wand and got out of there." Susan stepped right up to the older wizard and looked into his eyes. Her cheeks may have flushed a bit when he looked back.

"Did you transfigure a fake one first? Like I did?" Susan paled at Cedric's query.

No. She didn't.

"Come on." Cedric put an arm around the girl, not that she noticed now that her mind was in full panic mode. "You followed me into this mess and I promise to get you out of it."

"But... but where will you go?" Susan asked the question on autopilot; her mind really a million places at the same time.

"South. After I take you where you need to go, I'm heading south." The two started moving towards the dorms again. "Cho and Delores want to paint me as a supporter of the Delacour family and I'm quite keen on proving them right."

Amidst the cyclone of thoughts keeping Susan's mind on high alert, one part of Susan railed at the fact that she couldn't speak French and therefore was a poor candidate for continuing her education in Beauxbatons like Granger did. Odds were good that her parents would send her to Salem unless she was locked in her room until her father could marry her off. It depended on how well they took her being expelled.

-o\O/o-

Segolene woke up for what felt like her fourth morning in hell, not that she had any real way to tell time. She was in a industrial looking concrete block walled room with concrete floor and ceiling, no windows, two ceiling mounted lights and a sturdy metal door. There

was no handle on her side of the door, not that her hands were free to use one if there were. She was still bound hand and foot. She was still hoarse from screaming and still sore from the beating they gave her on her first night here.

At the end of her portkey ride, she was immediately stunned only to be revived at some later time. With halting, broken English, they demanded to know who she was, what she was and why she wasn't a Veela. She held her tongue as long as she could before they started upping the ante with dark curses and an old fashioned pummeling. Bastards felt that Imperio would have been too easy and wanted to have fun filling in the blanks.

At least she still had her clothes on. Thank Jeanne for small favors. Segolene heard the cries of another woman on and off for the whole time she'd been in the room. She supposed that this other woman must have actually been a Veela, making this the first time in ten years Segolene was quite thankful not to be one. She also felt no small amount of guilt for her relief that there was someone prettier than her for her captors to take interest in. More than once, she wondered why the Veela hadn't used her thrall to get out of this situation.

Her fellow captive was silent this morning, if it was morning, and so were their captors. This was different, and Segolene was becoming afraid that different could be bad for her. Her pulse began to spike as soon as she heard steps approaching. All too soon for her frayed nerves, the noise of a key being inserted into a lock filled her ears. For good or ill, they were coming. The door creaked open.

Tears began to fall from bloodshot eyes as the French witch saw two men enter her room and come straight for her. They were both a bit on the tall side and quite broad in the shoulders. Both were youngish blondes with a very short hair on top and bit of stubble showing. Were they not criminals of the worst sort, Segolene might have called them attractive. Both wore dark clothes which likely hadn't been cleaned with anything other than Scourgify in a long time.

One leered at Segolene and said something in a Slavic tongue. The other reached for her bound wrists. She screamed.

After a terrifying trip down two hallways and a flight of stairs, the sobbing French witch was finally dropped into a battered old chair and left to collect herself. The blondes didn't leave the room, but they did move to a table some ten meters away to pick up a bottle of Vodka and a deck of cards. Slowly, she came to enough to realize she was not about to be violated or beaten again and looked around. In the next chair over, bound hand and foot just as she was, sat one of the three sisters from the bar Segolene was abducted from. She had a heavy looking silver chain and rune covered amulet around her neck that the French witch assumed was some form of Veela suppressor. Just looking at the tear streaked and bruised face, Segolene knew that this was the woman which had been entertaining her captors as she herself curled into a ball and prayed very hard for a savior to come.

"Lucky girl. Client agreed to pay for you." A third man called from behind. He said a line or two in the local language before switching back again. The two blondes picked up a pair of rifles and walked out of the room. "Payment coming for you and Veela now. Very lucky witch. Anton was tiring of Veela."

The man laughed as he stepped around both bound women. Like the other two, he was a well built blonde with short hair, though this one looked ten or fifteen years older. He opened his mouth to keep the one sided conversation going but a chime sounded, causing him to look up as the two younger men returned with a wooden box between them.

The older man pulled out a wand and began to scan the box. After a minute of wand waving, less than half of which Segolene could follow, he opened the box. As the three men began to pull stacks of paper money out of the box, two naked plastic dolls were also pulled from the box and carefully set aside.

After an uncomfortable wait during which the three men carefully counted their payment, the older man finally stood up again. This time, he used his wand to levitate one of the plastic dolls over to the Veela. Seeing that her fate was sealed, the battered woman began shouting angrily at their captors. Tears came back again as the French witch found herself about to be sold into slavery. The first plastic doll slid into the bound and screaming Veela's cleavage; immediately after which, she disappeared. Segolene was now the only female in the room. She couldn't decide what would be worse...

the fate about to befall her or staying here however long it took for these men to find another buyer.

The second doll began to levitate. It was Segolene's turn to scream insults at her captor until he was no longer visible.

-o\O/o-

Deep in the North Atlantic, behind heavy surf and unnatural electromagnetic interference, those deemed unworthy of freedom or even happiness by the British Ministry of Magic were shipped to a harsh island prison to be taught a lesson or, more likely, to be forgotten. Azkaban. It was a desolate hunk of rock nearly overwhelmed by the great stone walls of England's only wizarding prison; one where half or more of the population consisted of dark creatures that fed on the happiness of other beings.

Deep inside the meter thick walls, under several floors of delirious and occasionally soul-less inmates, a heavy iron door opened. Two aurors entered the cell of one of England's most notorious witches and began to unlock her chains.

"Is it kissy time for Bella, now?" The ragged, skeletally thin woman with frayed black hair and sunken eyes rasped out.

"Shut up and come quietly or you might fall down a stairwell or something." The lead auror shot back.

"Come quietly? Ohhhhhh... it's been a very long time since any of you lot wanted that from pwetty wittle Bella. How exciting!"

Bellatrix Lestrange laughed as the men opened her last restraint and pulled her bodily out of the cell. While she lacked the strength to keep up with her escort, Bella was so underfed that the two men holding her hardly felt the extra weight between them.

Only two doors down from her own cell, Bella heard something new. Something she was surprised she hadn't heard before.

"...wake up, Mum..."

The youngest Black sister strained her ears. Her head swung around to one door in particular where the soft but clear voice could be heard. As the source of the noise was a recent novelty, the aurors stopped long enough to let Bella hear the voice clearly.

"...wake up, Mum... Mummy? Mum, wake up.... "

The auror nearest the door peered through its viewport to see the newest guest in this cell block. To be honest, none of the aurors were all that happy about this one but the higher ups sent her to Azkaban and there she'll stay until the Minister says otherwise. She was a little thing... still wearing what could have passed for a Hogwarts uniform if not for the lack of a tie and a missing coat of arms. He took a closer look.

Dirty blonde hair fell over her face in limp waves that were beginning to get tangled up. The girl was sitting in the center of the floor, feet tucked under her bum and poking one delicate finger into a woman that didn't exist. There was no 'Mum' here. There was, however, an older man lying slack in the corner of the room.

"Daddy? Mum won't wake up."

"She pretty much snapped the first night here." The auror said to Bella. After so many years in this hell hole, the woman deserved to know how she fared against others. "Spent one hour crying over 'Daddy' in the corner before the dementors came to pay their respects. She's been trying to wake 'Mum' up ever since."

Bella giggled and put all of her meager strength into looking over the auror's shoulder and into the cell.

"Tag. You're it."

The girl failed to react and Bella failed to stop giggling. Both aurors started pulling the older witch down the hall again.

-o\O/o-

"Segolene!"

Someone shouted her name. The French witch fought through her panic enough to open her eyes and pay attention.

"Fleur?" A cracking, abused voice called out as her eyes began to adjust to her new environment.

A crying French Veela fell onto her bound and beaten best friend. Salty kisses rained down upon the brunette's blotchy and dirt marred face.

"Fleur! Wh -cough- what's going on?" Segolene looked around, still not completely believing that things might end well after all.

The silver-blond Veela pulled her closest companion into a sitting position giving the brunette a chance to look around. They were in a hall of some sort; either a meeting hall in the town that she was taken from or perhaps a nearby facility as the decorations had a similar feel to them. They were inside in a very warm, well lit room with a variety of magicals and soldiers rushing about.

Healers and other personnel were beginning to swarm Segolene, but not before she saw that her sister-in-captivity had come to the same place as her and was receiving her own death hugs by way of her Veela sister. Segolene didn't see the third one anywhere about.

Several harsh sounding commands echoed out from the other end of the hall. The French witch looked that way and saw a group of soldiers collecting around a man who seemed to be orchestrating this rescue or whatever it was. A handful of intimidating looking wizards also joined the group.

Behind the French witches and local healers, a large group of men circled four portkeys with their weapons pointed out. The man in charge started yelling again. It sounded like a countdown. Ten seconds later, half the men in the room disappeared.

For the first time, Segolene saw a man sitting in a chair on the far end of the room. He used one hand to lift the edge of his facial bandages just enough to get a cigarette into his mouth for a quick puff before letting the bandages drop back into place again. To his right, two tarps guarded by a single soldier with an assault rifle covered man shaped objects on the floor. One of them had a bloody foot poking out of the near end. She wondered who those two were.

"They are going where you just came from." Miss Jones called now that the noise level in the room had dropped some. Her guide spoke a few more lines in Slavic. "Oleksandr says the lieutenant claimed they just spent a whole month's payroll on two girls only to find out that neither one is a virgin. They want their money back!"

Marion and Oleksandr both appeared next to Fleur as a pair of healers began to unbind the brunette and diagnose her condition.

"Oh, and the lieutenant is going to look for your wand too. No guarantees though..."

Segolene could work with that. She had Fleur and Fleur had Segolene and that's all that mattered right now.

-o\O/o-

"Harry? You look troubled."

The ghost looked up from the Delacour family dinner table. He and Alain were the only two present now that Apolline and Gabby were off for a little mother daughter time in the bath.

"Fleur is a bit late in writing, but it's happened before." Alain watched Harry fidget with his spectral collar. "No... I don't think that's it, is it?"

"No Sir." The ghost looked up. "I heard something the other day. Something from Hogwarts."

Harry floated out of his chair and began to glide in a tight circle near his living host.

"Zoé."

pop

"Yes, Monsieur Delacour?"

"Zoé, are my wife and daughter still in the bath?"

"Yes, Monsieur."

"Thank you, Zoé."

pop

"I'm listening." Alian looked intently enough at the ghost to get him to stop 'pacing'.

"Well... it's a bit of a rumor... friend of a friend and all that... but if it's true, well, it's very disturbing and I can't stop thinking about it."

"It's okay, Harry. I'll see if we can confirm it independently if it's as bad as that." Alain spoke in a calm tone to help Harry along.

"Umn. You see, Ginny- the Weasley girl I saved from the snake- she heard from Parvati who heard from her twin Padma in Ravenclaw who heard from Lisa Turpin who heard from a Slytherin witch friend of hers that Malfoy let slip that his dad knows Luna's spending time with her father."

"Luna? The Lovegood girl that disappeared?" Alain needed to be sure of the facts.

"That's right, Sir." Harry's gaze kept shifting around.

"Her father is in Azkaban." Alain supplied.

Harry slipped over to the fireplace and began to float in a tight circle before the warm crackling fire. "That's... that's right, Sir. If the rumor is true, then the DMLE put a teenaged witch in Azkaban and then covered it up."

"Harry. Listen very closely." The young ghost stopped spinning in circles and looked up. "I will look into this accusation. This one time, I want you to leave the maiden saving to me. Do you understand, Harry?"

"You'll look for Luna, then?" Harry still sounded uncertain.

"We are lucky you were able to escape your first ghostly experience with the British prison system. You may not be so lucky a second time."

Harry had to look off to the side.

"I promise that I will look for Miss Lovegood, and if I find her then she will be rescued. Do you believe me, Harry?"

"Y- yes, Sir."

"And, Harry?"

"Yes, Sir?"

"My name..."

Harry snorted. "I'm sorry, Alain."

"Think nothing of it."

-o\O/o-

11 december 1995

Dear Mother,

I must apologize for not writing sooner. We had some excitement while staying with the Volk sisters in Vidradne. It is still too upsetting to go into any detail at the moment, but rest assured that Segolene and I are both safe and well protected by people who seem to have a better appreciation for Veela than most. I wonder if being so close to our race's original homeland has made the locals feel this way.

I have been informed by our hosts that we are invited to Danya's wedding, which they plan on having in early spring. Both she and her future husband were injured during an attack which I assure you is not in any way related to our presence in the area. Both were hit with a dark curse in the face which local healers say will permanently scar. After accepting his proposition from her hospital bed, Danya asked her new fiancé why he would settle for her when her blemish-free sisters were still unattached. He claimed that matching wounds made them a perfect couple. It sounds silly, but he does seem to be the honorable sort. I wish them luck and many daughters.

I have written to Victor Krum as you asked. He is healing and in good spirits, though they still have not cleared him for competitive flying due to lost range of motion and chronic shoulder pain. He

admitted to maintaining correspondence with our dear Hermione while she is at Beauxbatons. I suspect that he would gladly accept an invitation to spend the New Years with us and the Grangers if I extend an offer. Shall I?

If we are very lucky, we will find the temple within a week's time and know before Christmas if the site has any secrets to reveal. It breaks my heart to be so far away from you and Gabrielle.

I miss you terribly,

Fleur

-o\O/o-

Hermione looked up as her door opened.

"'Mione?" Gabby asked.

"Come in, come in."

She negligently waived the little girl and accompanying teen wizard into her dormitory.

"Um... you're asleep now, 'Mione. You don't need to stay in here, you know." Harry added.

The witch stopped reading from a book on her desk just long enough to roll her eyes.

"It just doesn't make sense and I'm not resting until I've got it all worked out." She muttered.

Gabby hopped up onto Hermione's bed and began to test the mattress for bounce. Harry came up behind the curly brown haired witch and began to massage her shoulders.

"I've seen some of those standard text books you carry around. Pre-calculus? That math is worse than magical theory far as I'm concerned."

Under Harry's gentle assault, Hermione finally lost her ability to concentrate on the text in front of her and leaned back in her chair.

"I'm not revising right now. This is a book on rabbinical teachings." Hermione sighed as her boyfriend worked the day's stress out by kneading muscle and tendon alike. "I shouldn't have taken for granted that angels would be an easy topic to pin down. The only reason Beauxbatons has a fair number of books on them is due to the high number of Catholic raised French that attend the school. I had to spend most of my book shopping time during our mid-term break looking for ancient Jewish resources. And there's only so much I can do with books that have already been translated two, three or four times over the centuries... I can't read Hebrew and my Latin isn't quite up to snuff for this kind of challenge."

Gabby kicked off her shoes, pulled back on the comforter and got into bed. "If I go to sleep again, will I have dreams in my dream?"

"I don't know Gabby. This is 'Mione's dream though, so the question is 'can you have dreams in someone else's dream'."

Gabby made a non-committal noise before rolling over and getting comfortable. It looked to Harry like she was going to find out. He waited patiently for Hermione to continue, as he knew she would.

"I can't help but wonder if early Christians changed what the word angel means... not that they don't believe them to be messengers anymore, but to actually have winged beings who spend their time saving and smiting and singing His praises... well, that seems quite different from the angels of the Old Testament to me.

"The chariot-throne of God as described in Ezekiel is the source of three different angelic forms, but the Merkaba, 'throne' in Hebrew, is a restricted subject in traditional Jewish study and I've read warnings about those attempting to understand its meaning before they are properly prepared for it. It seems that Gabby's type of angel didn't really become popularized until the fourth or fifth century A.D. They were well enough established by the time of Hogwarts' founding to be common icons in religious art... Jeanne met one in the fourteen twenties... and now Gabrielle is the only confirmed living angel in the whole world. I feel like we're missing something really important."

"It's a pity that no magical scholars seem to have taken angels seriously." Harry commented as Hermione closed her eyes and let

her head drop backwards. "We know more about house elves than we do about our little angel."

Hermione's eyes snapped open. "House elves. Of course!"

Harry looked at the upside down face of Hermione in confusion. "What about them?"

"Don't you see, Harry? Dobby told me that house elves used to live independently in the forest until something happened to them and they nearly went extinct." The witch jerked up and spun around to address Harry properly. "Evolution! Or a rather abrupt magical version of it, anyway. Something happened two thousand years ago and the very definition of 'angel' changed. Angels went from being God's will given form to being independent living beings that performed His will. Why?"

Hermione got up and began pacing. Harry just watched.

"Myths and stories about angels are as common as UFO's and ghosts in the non-magical world, but you don't find them in the Wizarding world like you do ghosts. Are there more angels out there or is Gabby the only one? Some time before the modern era, angels seem to die out again but their legacy lives on in churches around the globe. Why did they all disappear?" She turned to the bed and looked at Angel. "What makes a Veela a Veela, Harry? Why is Gabby an angel if her mother and sister and aunt are not angels?"

Harry could only shake his head in ignorance. Gabby didn't move. In fact, she was already asleep again.

"Maybe Fleur will be able to shed some light on the subject when she returns, yeah?" Harry offered. "In the mean time, Gabby looks very snuggly right now and I want to see if I can dream in your dreams."

Harry kicked off his shoes and got into bed with Gabby. He then silently motioned for Hermione to join them. Hermione blushed.

"What?" Harry challenged. "It's not like I'll try anything with Gabby right here, is it? You can keep your clothes on too."

Hermione looked conflicted for a moment before she built up her resolve. Then, as Harry watched, Hermione wriggled her nose back and forth sort of like Harry had seen a 'witch' do on a very old telly program once before. In less time than it took for him to blink, everyone was wearing cotton pajama sets; even the sleeping Little Angel. At Harry's stare, Hermione blushed again.

"I've been practicing a bit too... and it is my dream world you're standing in. Budge over some." The teen witch crossed over to her dream-dorm's bed and got in next to Harry and Gabby. "And don't hog all the covers."

Hermione soon learned that she could indeed dream in her dreams, though she lost all control of the contents. Harry learned that he was too unused to sleeping with witches to actually do any sleeping. He could be a pillow this time... and maybe try to get some actual sleep the next time they try.

-o\O/o-

"Valkyrie... -crack- Valkyrie, this is HMS Birm-crack-am please respond...-pop- Valkyrie..."

"Sir, we are losing electrical systems." A man called out.

Lights began to flicker on and off throughout the ship. In the dark of an overcast winter night over a dozen nautical miles north of the Orkney Islands, bridge illumination dropped to nothing in seconds.

"Sonar and radio are out! The compass is spinning continuously now." A woman two chairs further down the bridge called. "Our diesel engines just died as well, Sir."

The captain didn't call for general quarters or any form of repairs to be made. They knew this was going to happen. He put a wand to his throat.

"Sonorous." The three others manning the bridge turned to the Old Man as he spoke. "This is Captain Allinder speaking. We have crossed the ward lines. It is now safe to use magic. Activate all ward stones in the engine room. All hands to battle stations. Combat operations begin in five minutes."

Oberleutnant Adler Koertig, on loan to the I.C.W. from Germany's II Auror Corps watched in silence as the all-magical crew of the Valkyrie illuminated the bridge and activated magical propulsion and navigational systems. In his opinion, Germany could use a ship or two just like this one. On the outside, the Valkyrie looked no different than hundreds of other freighters plying European waterways, but this one had a few tricks up her sleeve and Captain Allinder was likely to use all of them tonight.

As Captain Allinder canceled his sonorous, a sailor entered from the starboard hatch. Freezing rain followed him through the open door, but in that now heavily enchanted environment it meant little.

"Sir. HMS Birmingham is trying to hail us with signal lamps. She's coming about." While the ships crew were all Norwegian, this was a French and I.C.W. backed mission necessitating use of a common language in cases where other nationalities were present like the bridge. English. How ironic.

"Dammit!" The captain barked. "Signal them back. Tell them that we are operational and that they are to remain on station as ordered."

"Aye, Sir." The man turned to man their own signal lamp.

"And charm yourself dry and warm, man!"

"Aye, Sir!"

The Oberleutnant was both pleased and annoyed that the politicians thought this mission important enough to get non-magical England's cooperation. The British PM and a select few Royals knew of the magical situation, thanks to the French, and were willing to trick the Royal Navy into escorting a 'scientific research vessel' into a 'Bermuda Triangle like' stretch of the North Sea. If there was a shit meet fan moment, then a genuine military vessel with air/sea rescue ability might be really useful.

"Lieutenant Koertig," Captain Allinder called, "back to your men."

Koertig smartly saluted and turned for the door leading to a stair down. When he reached the cargo bay of the Valkyrie, he saw five teams of thirteen wizards (himself included) and witches prepare to

leave the ship. Every magical present was wearing a heavy outer cloak with mottled grey patterns and a modest unit insignia on one shoulder. For each man and woman present, the letters 'ICW' were stitched across their own national flag with the letter coloration denoting rank. Koertig himself had silver letters over black, red and yellow bars. Wands were checked for cracks. Spare portkeys were placed in easy to reach pockets. Extra clips were grabbed by those carrying automatic weapons.

The captain's voice washed over his crew and passengers a second time. "Unlimber the forward battery! Two minutes!"

At the ship's bow, three wizards began enchanting an old but serviceable five inch deck gun. First, they knocked any remaining ice off of the weapon and coated it with warming charms. One wizard took control of the gun's aim while two others opened the breech block and levitated one round of ammunition into place. Seconds later, the gun was loaded and aimed at a jet black mass two miles dead ahead, nearly indistinguishable from the open sea to either side. Azkaban prison.

"Open the hatches!" Captain Allinder ordered from above.

Koertig and his men were ready, as were the men and women of the other four teams. As soon as the hatches were fully opened, the French Captain in charge of all five teams gave the order to move. Sixty-five broomriders shot out of the Valkyrie's hold.

The cloud of seasoned aurors and hit wizards crossed choppy seas to get near their objective in just under two minutes. As soon as they reached the frozen walls of the English wizarding prison, the teams split up. The Captain's team flew above the island to keep track of the other four and provide reserves and a read guard. Koertig's men and an East European team shot down to the front gate and began painting it with highly luminous spells far more potent than bluebell flames. Two French teams flew straight for the parapets and began looking for any British aurors who may actually be out on a rooftop patrol.

As soon as the gate was properly lit up, Koertig pulled out a mirror and called out. "Gunnery! The target is lit!"

"Team Two. Ten seconds!" Came the reply.

Both teams near the front gate backed out to a safe distance. There was a flash in the distance.

Four seconds later a massive chunk of Azkaban's front wall blew outward. If the British guards didn't know they were under attack before, that should have been a pretty good wake up call.

"Three meters high! Five meters wide right!" Koertig shouted into his mirror.

Another flash was followed by a second explosion. Stone shattered and fell onto a small pier before the gate.

"One meter wide left."

Another flash and a third explosion. The prison gate shattered in a cloud of wooden shrapnel.

"Stand by!" Koertig called.

Magical sparks shot into the air. Fifty two armed magicals moved into the attack. Azkaban was a fortress, an inhospitable outpost that was nearly impossible to reach and impossible to escape, but it was not a military outpost and as such was not manned well enough to repel assault. Less than two dozen aurors staffed the prison and most of those were either past their prime or wizards who've pissed off the wrong bureaucrat.

The first man through the front gate was struck in the chest by a red spell which knocked him off his broom. Five attack spells passed him from either side in an effort to make whoever cast that first spell look for cover again. As the Germans dismounted and raised wand and rifle, the team behind them all cast Patronus Charms together, filling the entry corridor with a powerful dementor shield. After confirming that his first casualty was being taken care of, the Oberleutnant ordered his men to prepare an assault on the pair of heavy doors visible to their left. The team behind them kept their weapons pointed forward, eager to continue forward again once the Germans were clear of the hall.

With a quick series of hand signals, Koertig organized his men for an attempt on the doors. His second in command wove a spell or

two over them before looking back and nodding. It was unlocked. Another auror stepped up with a flash-bang grenade in hand.

As the second in command pushed one of the door open from one side, the grenade was tossed in from the other.

"Peterson? What was that noise?" The Germans outside the door braced themselves. "Look here, yo-"

BOOM

The force of the blast had re-closed the door on whoever was inside. That had to hurt... Koertig's ears were ringing and he was on the other side of a heavy stone wall. Without pause, the first six members of his team breached the door. The German officer heard two shots fired over the ringing in his ears before gunfire stopped. One of the first men through came back to the door and signaled that the room was clear. Seven more aurors passed through the doors.

Inside, Koertig saw four British subjects on the floor. Two of them were bound and unconscious but otherwise healthy looking. An older looking wizard lay crumpled on the floor, two bullet holes in his bare chest and a wand on the floor by his feet. His pants looked to be partially undone. Huddled into a ball on a couch to the side was a prisoner, a brunette with pale skin who looked to be in her mid twenties. She was holding her prisoner's robes in front of her like a shield. She was not wearing them. It looked like these aurors had been conducting a morally questionable interrogation when Koertig so rudely interrupted them. Knowing time was not on their side one of the attacking aurors just stunned the woman so they could deal with her later. On to the next door.

The next room was empty, as were the four rooms behind that one. The next one, however...

"Hands up!"

"Eeeee!" Clang!

A pot of stew overturned and fell to the floor.

Germans swarmed the kitchen pointing wands and barrels between two terrified women and every nook and cranny in sight. The women were wearing dirty, frayed robes with heavy stains down the front. One of them started crying.

"Put your wands on the table." They just stood there, faces clearing showing incomprehension. "Wands! Now!"

"W-we don't have wands. We're squibs! P-please don't hurt us! We didn't do nothin' wrong!" Now both women were crying.

"Where are the other guards? The barracks?" Koertig's second asked.

With a shaky finger, the shorter of the two women pointed to one side. "M-might be four or six sleepin' right now... hadn't been this low in some time... b-budget cuts an' all. My- my son just got the boot last month... hadn't even finished auror training neither. But it's not like these lazy bums would clean up after themselves is it? And Minister Fudge took the house elves what used to work here for his own home years ago..."

Yes, yes. Her life story was fascinating and all, but they were in the middle of a hostile takeover of the prison and had to leave before more Englishmen decided to visit the island.

"Sorry about this. Stupefy. Stupefy."

The first squib looked about to panic before she fell to darkness. The second one seemed relieved that she wasn't getting hit with something worse.

The largest group of English his team encountered so far were, in fact, still asleep. A wave of silent Stupefies and binding spells later meant the end of any threat from the administrative wing of the prison.

As Koertig and his men made their way back to the entry hall, they collected any unconscious English they passed by as well as any documents. They intentionally searched for dementor repelling and controlling items of which there were a good many.

"Captain Martin, this is Lieutenant Koertig." The Oberleutnant called over his communication mirror. "Objective complete."

"Casualties, Lieutenant?" The French Captain's voice replied.

"One walking wounded. Bauer. We have eleven prisoners, though one of them is a detainee and two are squib cooks. One Englishman is dead, possibly the Warden."

"Take them all back to the causeway, Lieutenant. We have two flying carpets waiting for you. Team three has reported that all dementors on site have fallen back behind a heavy gate which appears to lead into dungeons. You should not encounter any more but report immediately if you do."

"Yes, Sir."

The Oberleutnant knocked twice on a wooden door frame as he passed through. Things were going well and he hoped that they stayed that way.

Four floors above the German team, a French team was in the process of going cell to cell checking on the prisoners. A cell door rattled open, but neither cell occupant reacted at all. The assaulting aurors were learning quickly to expect that.

"Aw, crap. I think we found the schoolgirl." An auror muttered in French as he and his partner entered the cell to evacuate the prisoners.

"...Mummy, please..." There, in the center of the cell, sat Luna Lovegood. Her father was leaning against a wall, seemingly asleep.

"I'm sorry, sweetheart." Luna made no move to acknowledge that she heard the wizard before a Stupefy struck the girl in her chest. She'd be easier to evacuate unconscious.

Forty minutes later, the prison was clear of its prisoners and guards; every single one was transferred onto the assault ship two miles out to sea and every member of the attack force was on board with them. British Auror Headquarters still hadn't responded to the attack.

Finally, there was one last objective to achieve before returning to their muggle naval escort. As the bridge crew and each officer from the assault teams strained to see the glowing remainders of Azkaban's front gate nearly two nautical miles away, a brief flash emanated from the opening and seemed to rise up from the courtyard as well.

-BOOOOOM-

The dull echo of an explosion reached the ship though much of the explosion was hidden by weather.

Oberleutnant Koertig raised his hand in salute to the Russians who placed over two tonnes of high explosives along the larger loadbearing walls on the prison's ground floor. He wanted to see those damned dementors try to dig out from under the rubble of an entire fortress.

"Due East, Mister Falstad." Captain Allinder ordered. "Let's not keep the Birmingham waiting too long."

"Aye, Sir."

-o\O/o-

Draco Malfoy strolled across Hogwarts grounds with a smug grin on his face and Daphne Greengrass's arm entwined with his.

"We are not dating, Malfoy." The Slytherin witch said with an even, emotionless tone.

"It's only a matter of time, Daphne." Draco pulled her in closer.

"This wasn't part of the deal." Still no emotion from the witch. Draco was both impressed and disappointed at the same time.

"Your right about the deal technically... but don't you see? You help me keep ahead of the rumors and I keep you popular enough to make all those social connections you wouldn't get otherwise. How better to stay popular than to be on my arm?"

Draco spared a moment to wink at the younger witch walking next to Daphne. Astoria was Daphne's younger sister, and while she was a

bit too young for his tastes this year, she would surely be quite striking when it came time to seriously consider who would be the next Lady Malfoy. The rumors of her crushing on him were quite promising. When she blushed and looked away, Draco's smile went up another notch.

"You are making me more popular... more popular with common folk. What do I care for the fashion advice of Sally-Anne Perks and Penelope Clearwater? You are becoming more trouble than you're worth."

Draco just laughed. "A very wise political adviser once said, 'Keep your friends close but your enemies closer.' You should think about that for a while."

"I can't believe that came out of your mouth, Malfoy. By that logic you should have been Potter's closest mate from the beginning."

That almost made Draco angry. His step faltered and Daphne noticed. Point to her.

"I did offer. He met up with Weasel and the mudblood first. They poisoned his mind to Slytherins, no doubt."

"And your need for revenge was so great that you started the biggest student rivalry in Hogwarts History? Couldn't really admit to yourself that he died, could you? Kept going on all last year like he was still your greatest enemy... just not one that could fight back. Is that why you changed? You can finally admit he's dead?"

The blonde pureblood prince thought that was an interesting deduction. Wrong, but interesting.

"Not at all. I was taught a valuable lesson over the summer. The future of our world isn't what father told me it would be it would be and I find that simply unacceptable."

"Are you stepping out from under your father's shadow, then? He just became the Minister for Magic." Daphne slipped a little closer to Draco. "Most would think it best to use his influence as much as possible."

Surprised, he turned to look her in the eyes. She was still looking forward, her perfect mask of the perfect lady not disturbed in the least. 'So you can play the game. Maybe I won't have to switch to your sister after all.'

"I have my doubts about some of Father's goals. That's why I'm looking at all the options no matter how distasteful they may seem at first." He took a moment to breathe deeply. "I think we've been out long enough... don't you Astoria?"

The younger girl blushed fiercely and nodded. Draco thought he felt a twinge in Daphne's grip. Point to Draco?

"Well! It's time to get things ready for Magical Traditions tonight. Shall we?" The girls both nodded. "I do apologize for forcing you fine young ladies to interact with common folk, mudbloods and blood traitors- but it really is for the greater good. Just be patient and you will see my genius in time."

As three young pureblood elites strolled through Hogwarts grounds on a path of fresh grass and wildflowers magically blasted out of the snowbanks due to a Herbology/Charms combination project, an owl crossed the property line and turned for its final target.

Bark! Bark!

The teens stopped as the dark brown feathered owl circled their party twice before landing right in front of them. It looked right at Draco and held up one leg.

Bark!

As much as releasing Daphne to take the offered post irked him, Draco knew not to ignore the bird. After carefully removing the owl's cargo and seeing it off, he snapped open the Gringott's seal and read the letter.

"What's it say then?" Astoria asked. She received a glare from her sister. "...sorry..."

"Don't be so harsh on your sister, Daphne dear." Draco refolded the parchment and slid it into his pocket. "It's only a notice that I won a

bet with good odds. Looks like I can really spoil my close friends this Christmas."

Astoria seemed even more interested than before. Was she a close friend? "May I ask what the bet was on?" She eeked out.

Draco wasn't smiling anymore, but he answered just the same. "I bet that Azkaban would suffer another brake-out before the end of this school year. I think we can guess what tomorrow's headline for the Prophet will be, don't we?"

It was his father's shadow beginning to shrink already?

End Chapter

Chapter Fifteen: No Boys Allowed

"Ohhhh, this isn't good."

Cedric shook his newspaper a little to get the folds out.

"What isn't?" Susan asked between bites of stew.

The two were sitting down for a warm lunch in one of the smaller pubs just off Diagon Alley. Though smaller in size and reputation, it was actually cleaner and brighter than the Leaky Cauldron. Only its poor location prevented it from being a popular lunch destination. For two teens recently expelled from school and unsure of what the future holds, it was the perfect place to relax and get out of the cold for a little while.

"It says here that Azkaban was raided. All the prisoners are free and the guards were all slaughtered."

"Was it..." Susan looked around the pub before meekly continuing, "Sirius Black?"

Cedric snorted. "They are claiming he was there, but I don't believe it for a second."

Susan's eyes widened. "Why not? He's a dangerous criminal."

She wanted to yell that last bit, but there were other people in the dining room. Some witch just stumbled in through the front door and made a scene with the waitress; Susan didn't want to get singled out like that clumsy fool.

"Do you really still believe that?" Cedric challenged across the table. "You know what they've been printing about your aunt."

The fifteen year old witch looked down into her stew and began to poke at a bit of beef with her spoon.

"But... but everyone knows he betrayed the Potters!" Susan hissed.

"You just don't understand how badly the Ministry's been lying to us normal wizards and for how long... You know how I spent the end of summer at the Delacour's right?"

Susan nodded.

"I wasn't their only guest. Hermione was there with her parents and Harry... and his godfather." Cedric said.

"I don't remember hearing any rumors about a godfather... who's Harry's godfather?" Susan asked.

"You two really need to learn to use privacy charms more often."

Cedric and Susan both froze on the spot. A short witch with dull brown hair and a boil on her cheek cast a silent charm before sliding her wand back up her left sleeve and sitting down right next to Susan. It was the same witch that just finished apologizing to the waitress for pulling her to the floor in a tangle of limbs.

"And you are?" Cedric asked, one hand slipping below the tabletop.

"No need to get your knickers in a twist, luv." The strange witch cooed while placing both hands palm down on the table in front of her.

She turned from a glaring Cedric to the panicking witch at her side and winked. Well, she didn't just wink... she changed her nose into a pig snout, winked, and changed it back again. Susan went from hopeless to shocked in a heartbeat.

"But- but Auntie said you-" The metamorph shushed her tablemate heavily.

"Keep it down Susie. Privacy charms don't catch everything you say if you scream it to the heavens."

"You know her?" Cedric asked Susan.

She nodded and caught her breath. Before answering, she gave a questioning glance to their new tablemate who answered with a hesitant nod. Susan sat a little straighter and began the introductions.

"This is Auror Tonks. She used to spend a lot of time with Auntie before getting imprisoned in that ICW scuffle over the summer. Auror Tonks, this is Cedric Diggory."

Tonks offered a hand to Cedric for shaking, which he took cautiously.

"Have you done your Christmas shopping for this year, cutie? Maybe bought something shiny for a very pretty bird we both know?"

"Maybe..."

"Good, good." Tonks smiled before turning serious again. "Make sure to let her daddy take a look at it before you give it to her... we don't want a repeat of last time, now do we?"

"Wait... what happened last time?" Cedric asked.

"Never you mind, luv. It's over and done with."

Now Tonks had both of them confused. Brilliant. "So. I plan on spending the holidays prancing up and down a Mediterranean beach topless. Anybody fancy going with? I'm allowed to invite anyone who's in danger of getting snatched up by Ministry officials and never being heard from again."

"And never... Luna!" Susan grabbed Tonks's hand. "That's what happened to Luna. Do you think she was in Azkaban when..." She waved at the Prophet lying between them on the table.

"I wouldn't know, Susie, but I work with some blokes who work with some blokes that might be able to answer that question for you. Interested?"

"Yes, please." Susan practically begged. Cedric nodded along with her. "But... is the offer open to my parents too? Auntie keeps telling them to get out of England and I couldn't leave them behind."

"Absolutely- and Amelia should come along too, but let's take care of you two first." Tonks stood up and motioned the other two to follow. "Come on you two. Last time I checked, the muggle ferry at Dover was still being ignored by our esteemed Auror Command."

-o\0/o-

"I'm sorry, Luna, I..." But Harry couldn't say anything more.

The girl didn't move except for the slow and steady rhythm of her breathing. Harry took in the girl's appearance. Her hair and skin were clean, thanks to the healers, but she seemed to lack that special spark Harry saw in her after he worked on her bleeding hand in Myrtle's bathroom.

At least people were doing what they could for her. Luna was in a comfortable looking bed in a clean room that looked just about what Harry expected a normal hospital room to look like. There were cabinets and counters with a smooth polished looking sink, orderly piles of plastic wrapped supplies and plenty of lighting fixtures, though some of the latter were switched off for Luna's comfort. There were even a few electric machines of some sort strapped to her arm doing something or other that involved beeping.

"Her father passed on before they could make it back to dry ground. They were equipped to rescue prisoners but caught off guard with how many of them were malnourished, diseased... or kissed. It's almost worse to see the body of one who's been kissed, Harry. They can still breath... if you keep feeding them then they can still live- but it's a mockery. How can the body continue on when its soul has been ripped out?" Harry heard real emotion in Alain's voice. Did he know someone who was kissed? Was Luna...

"Not Luna! Please tell me they-"

"No, Harry." Alain soothed the spirit before him. "She's said a few things in her delirious state and she has been in and out of sleep a few times since then ... not good for her diagnosis but it does prove that her soul was not taken."

"Thank Jeanne for that." Harry wondered if Jeanne would say he was welcome or if she would complain that she hadn't done anything when another disturbing question popped into his head.

"Her father. You said he died, but do we know...?" The ghost nervously looked around to see if they had left Mr. Lovegood's body in the same room. They didn't.

"We don't know if her father was kissed. I'd prefer to think he wasn't and it's best if you don't worry yourself over it. We cannot help the man now, but perhaps we will be able to do something for his daughter."

Alain sat down in a chair as Harry's gaze returned to the sleeping witch with a beeping machine tethered to her arm. He caught a little movement around her face and he snapped to attention.

"Is she trying to blink?"

Her eyes moved under their lids. Alain stood back up so he could see for himself.

"I'm afraid not, Harry. That's just her eyes moving as she sleeps. She's most likely dreaming right now. I hope her dreams aren't too affected by all this, but I wouldn't be at all surprised if they begin treating her with dreamless sleep potion among other things. It's a common need of abuse victims."

Harry looked away. There were quite a few nights he could remember where dreamless sleep potion would have been a godsend even before his Hogwarts letter came. Behind him, an attendant stepped up to Alain and whispered several quick words into the man's ear.

"I have to go, Harry. Duty calls. I trust you can make your own way out today?"

"Yes, Alain. And I promise to tell the guards when I leave this time." The ghost spoke up mindful of a minor crisis stemming from his last exit from Ministry grounds. Apparently being dead is no excuse for ignoring official security protocols.

Soon, Harry was alone with Luna. He looked to her face, trying his best to see her silvery-grey orbs even as they jerked back and forth under her eyelids. He wondered what she might be dreaming about.

She was in Azkaban Prison for one week give or take. Sure, Sirius had survived that hellhole for far longer but he was a grown man by then and Luna seemed, well, strong in her own way but terribly delicate by most standards. Harry remembered his own troubles

with dementors the year before last and had to say that a week in Azkaban would most likely do to him what it did to Luna.

"This isn't right..." The ghost muttered. "...but what can I-"

Harry cut off his own monologue when he remembered Alain's comment on Luna's eye movement. 'Most likely dreaming right now.' He said, right?

"Luna. I seem to remember you mentioning once before that I can save you anytime. How 'bout now?"

Harry patiently waited for Luna to respond. She didn't. Harry drifted closer to the sleeping blonde.

"No preference? I'll give you one last chance to say 'no'. If you really don't want my help, just say so."

Her chest rose and fell and her eyes jumped and turned but she made no move to stop him. Perfect.

Harry moved the palm of his right hand over Luna's forehead and concentrated. Seconds later, his form blurred and disappeared from the waking world.

"Mummy? Mummy, please..."

Harry slowly worked his way forward mindful of small bits of broken glass and overturned potion vials on the floor between himself and his goal. The room was a mess. Had a potion exploded or something?

"Mum?"

"Luna!" Harry called.

She didn't bother looking up.

"Luna?"

Instead of acknowledging Harry's presence in any way, the witch just sat on her knees in the middle of a field of splinters, bubbling puddles and glass shards as she poked a woman on her shoulder.

As Harry moved closer, he noticed that this Luna wasn't quite the same girl as he met in Myrtle's bathroom or in the hospital bed 'outside'. In fact she was quite a bit smaller. Maybe eight years old? The woman Luna was poking at was face down, a curtain of white-blond hair blocking her face from view, but Harry was pretty sure that this was in fact Luna's mother... or a dream version of her anyway.

"Daddy? Mummy isn't waking up. Why isn't she waking up?"

Harry had a sinking feeling that this was Luna's dementor generated vision... her worst nightmare. And it was so close to his, too. Mum. Dead. Right there in front of him - er, her. He shuddered thinking that he could already guess what kind of special hell would have awaited him had he ever been imprisoned the same way.

Harry put a hand on little Luna's shoulder.

"NOOO! Don't let them get me!" The little girl panicked and wrapped herself around her dead mother as tightly as she could. "Go away!"

Harry staggered back. Who did she think he was?

"Don't let them eat my soul! Patronus them, Mummy, make them go away!"

"N-no, Luna... that's not it. I'm not a dementor. I want to help!"

All Harry got in for his effort was a pitiful moan. This wasn't working. Harry looked around for something, anything that looked like he could use it in some helpful way. No, there was nothing in the room that hadn't been either overturned or smashed to pieces. There was a spiral stair going up from the center of the room and an ice rimmed semilune window revealing a bit of overcast sky. Come to think of it, this room was rather chilly. Harry carefully made his way to the half-round glass and looked through.

"Bloody hell..." Dementors. Lots of them.

Harry took another look at the little girl shaking in terror on the floor. He had to do something.

With that thought, Harry turned and jogged over to the spiral stair. He took the steps as quickly as he could given that a few of the wrought-iron treads seemed to have deformed in whatever accident took Luna's mother from her.

At the next level up, Harry found himself in a brightly painted circular kitchen with a door that appeared to lead outside. He took the door immediately.

Outside of Luna's dream house, Harry found that this particular bit of English countryside was cold and lifeless, not just a winterscape but completely lifeless. He had no doubt that the dementors were to blame for this. The sodding bastards were floating about aimlessly just about everywhere he could see.

Harry caught a flash of light in the corner of his eye. In fact, it was the only light source he had seen aside from the overcast sky.

There it was again. Harry had no idea what it was, being at least a football pitch away, but it seemed to dart about energetically over a dense cluster of dementors. Harry figured that if he were going to find anything of use for his damsel saving quest in this desolate landscape, it would probably have something to do with that light over there.

After long hours of practice in two fertile dreaming minds, it was second nature for Harry to summon his Firebolt and shoot into the air. Crossing the hundred plus meter distance was nothing on his broom, but what he saw at the end of his speed run nearly threw him due to sheer surprise.

Two people were surrounded by a hoard of dementors in a scene disturbingly similar to one from his own life, except that this situation looked a bit worse. Instead of a brilliant stag chasing off the soul sucking creatures, a single patronus which looked like a cross between a hare and an antelope was only just keeping the dementors at bay.

Harry once again used his dream shaping skills, this time to pull a wand from his pocket. Perhaps if he were paying more attention, he would have noticed that this wand wasn't his. In fact, the silver chain dangling from one end marked it clearly as belonging to his Angel.

He almost cast the spell using the same happy thoughts as when he last did this over Black Lake, but Harry knew that this time he could do much better. What was flying on a broom or even remembering the voice of a father Harry didn't clearly remember compared to the love and devotion of his 'Mione? Even greater still was the absolute feeling of pure love and joy that filled Harry when Angel met her school friends and released her thrall in front of them for the first time.

"Expecto Patronum!" Harry belted out.

The dazzlingly luminous form which shot out of Harry's Gabby wand was not a stag. Not with those hands and those feet and those long wavy strands of hair... and the wings. Where Gabrielle's last conjured patronus looked just like Harry, his own patronus was now the Angel Gabrielle. With no small swell of pride, he watched an angel of light tear through the ring of dementors and scatter them to the four winds.

Harry pulled his broom around and followed in patronus-Gabby's wake as she dove into the focus of all those dementors. As he neared the ground he began to see two figures in more detail. One, a wizard by the looks of him, was lying on the ground with his robes and long blonde hair pooled about him. A woman with soft waves white-blond hair stood protectively over her companion with wand and patronus at the ready.

"Pardon me," Harry began, "But who are you?"

The woman seemed to glance between Harry and his patronus, which was still hunting down and scaring off the odd soul sucker, before deciding to lower her wand.

"I'm Selene Lovegood and this is my husband, Xenophilius." Selene gave Harry a brief bow before turning her wand on her husband and bringing him out of his faint with a quick Enervate.

"Why darling, when did you come back to life?" The man exclaimed as he struggled up off the ground.

"I didn't, dear." Wry amusement showed in Selene's face.

"Oh."

Having mastered standing in one place again, Mister Lovegood pulled his wife into a tight embrace. Harry felt terrible interrupting but there was one more Lovegood in this dreamscape and she was most likely still cowering in terror down in the cellar.

"Um, hate to interrupt such a tender moment... really, I do... but I had to leave Luna crying in the cellar of that house over there to find you two and I think she really needs her mum right about now."

Harry's comment was punctuated by the timely arrival of an angel patronus. The glowing vision of innocence and power touched her feet to the ground, flared her wings twice and dissolved into a cloud of white sparks.

"Thank you Mister Potter." Selene said once her husband was willing to give her some air. "Thank you for helping my little girl. You are the first boy to give her a second glance... it's a pity you're both dead and taken."

"That won't stop me from being her friend, Mam."

"Bless you for that." Selene gave Harry a warm smile before turning her attention back to Xenophilius. "Come, husband dear. Those foul beasts ruined my perfect record; I've visited Moonbeam every night in her dreams up until a week ago when they showed up. Mister Potter here is quite right. She needs us."

Xenophilius Lovegood was somewhat shaky and disoriented and overwhelmed at having his long dead wife back by his side again, but he hadn't forgot completely about Luna.

"Of course, of course." Xenophilius looked between Selene, Harry and the house on the next hill over. "Well, young man, if you could please show us the way, I'd like nothing better than to have both my witches in my arms at the same time."

Harry smiled and nodded. He knew the feeling.

Later that afternoon, Harry reappeared next to Luna in the healing facility dedicated to innocent victims of Azkaban. He couldn't immediately see any changes by looking at her. Her chest was still rising and falling and her eyes still jumped back and forth under their

lids. Still, he was satisfied. Luna would be better now, even if she didn't remember what happened deep inside of her dreams. He was sure of it.

"Don't be a stranger, Luna Lovegood." Harry called.

After one last look, Harry turned in place and floated out of the room through the door. These ICW security types tend to get a little jumpy if you phase through a wall to talk to them.

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"Ah, here we are." Marion Jones mumbled while brushing fresh snow off of ancient floor tiles.

Segolene got Fleur's attention and cast another warming charm on herself. It helped, but the Ukrainian winter was not very forgiving and the ruins they were working in lost all roof structure centuries ago. Maybe she shouldn't have worn silk today.

For the past two days, the two French witches and Marion have been camping out in the middle of a collection of ancient snow covered brick walls at the edge of a frozen lake. Two magical tents were erected for their personal comfort and safety while a more mundane pavilion was available for planning, breaks and space for the messenger birds they brought. Space heaters. The pavilion had space heaters. Segolene loved space heaters.

Fleur and Segolene stepped around Marion and looked down at the floor tiles before her. They were cracked and incomplete, but there was a bit of imagery left over after all these years.

"See? We're in the right place." Marion commented now that she had an audience. "It's hard to see, but there's definitely a winged female form here annnnd... here."

As the two younger witches leaned over for a closer view, Marion opened a small notebook that had been sitting on her lap and found the page she was looking for.

"Great-grandad's team took just about anything they could with them back in thirty-two, but I brought a copy of his journal outlining all of the artifacts they did take and where they took them from. This is the

room the best preserved artifacts came from... the ones that showed demons holding Hellfire in their palms."

Fleur and Segolene looked at each other sharply. Winged female demons casting fire from their hands? Looks like there really were in the right place.

"Miss Delacour?" Marion called as she wove a pattern in the air with her wand.

"Yes, Miss Jones?"

"This isn't an early Christian church, is it?"

"You would know better zan I, Miss Jones." Fleur replied.

"Oh, I have no doubt that a church was here at some point, but there was something else here first. You're not researching early Christian history, are you?" Marion lowered her wand and stood up.

Fleur's gaze flickered a few times between Marion and Segolene before finally settling on the cursebreaker.

"If I am to answer zat question, zen I will need an unbreakable vow zat what you learn here will never be discussed outside of ze zree of us and ze ozzer females of my family. Will you agree to zis vow?"

After a few tense moments, Marion nodded. The witches took a short but necessary break from their magical archeology to get the wording right and then cast the vow between Marion and Fleur with Segolene acting as their binder for the ceremony.

"Okay, ladies." Marion called as soon as they were done. "I believe I asked a question before our little break. Care to answer it now?"

"Oui. And you were right before. We are not interested in Christian churches. Ze female figures you see on ze floor are not demons... ze are Veela. My people once had a high temple and a priestess class who maintained it. I believe zat we are standing in what remainz of ze temple." As Fleur updated their guide, Segolene relaxed. It looked like her obliviation skills would not be necessary after all.

"I doubt this used to be the temple, " Marion said, looking at the loose stack of brick before them, "Perhaps there is a hidden entrance nearby."

The cursebreaker leveled her wand again. "That would explain why I see a set of magical wards focused on this room... they appear to be door triggers and I don't see any traps. Your priestesses must not have learned their trade in Egypt or we would have already seen about a dozen death wards and pitfalls by now."

"Can you tell how to open the door? " Segolene asked.

"Not yet." Marion answered, "There seem to be several wards up even if they don't feel hostile. I'll need some time to look them over and break them down. Say... are you two any good at arithmancy or runes?"

"I left Beauxbatons wiz a firm understanding of ze subjects, but Segolene is ze true star." Fleur winked at her lover and Segolene blushed at the compliment. "Her final project in runes was a battery charger zat ran off of free ambient magic."

"Good. This will go faster with you two helping." Marion began to wave her wand to and fro again. Soon Marion was calling out numbers and comments as Segolene and Fleur scrambled for paper and pen.

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Alain Delacour looked over the stacks of files and reports on his desk and sighed. This business with England was overwhelming- and it wasn't even supposed to be his responsibility. Foreign Affairs was the real strong arm of the Ministry when dealing with such an international crisis, but after factoring in the British focus on French citizens... and his rather unique extended family... Alain was effectively working for one department while running another.

Of course, there were rumors about his prospects for a higher office... and next year was an election year... but no. Alain had much more daunting dragons to slay. In fact, judging by his office clock, one of them should be arriving any moment now.

He touched the Department Seal on his desk. "Guillimette."

"Yes Monsieur Delacour?" His secretary's voice returned.

"Has my ten thirty appointment arrived?"

"He just turned the corner, sir."

"Waive him in for me then."

"Yes sir."

Alain leaned back in his chair and waited. Two seconds later, a ghost passed through his office door.

"Thank you for coming, Harry."

"I don't mind Alain." Harry replied as he took his chair. "Gabby actually likes for me to tell her how you are doing during the day."

"Really?" Alain's heart swelled a little at the news. "I truly wish that I could see her more often. There just isn't enough time in the day for all that I must do."

Alain's face turned serious, prompting Harry to 'sit' on the edge of his seat.

"Foreign Affairs and their I.C.W. friends have finished the first round of interviews for everyone we pulled off of Azkaban with Miss Lovegood. There were a lot of real horror stories about innocents thrown into cells without any trial or even an excuse as I'm sure you were expecting... and most of those are going right to the press to drum up support for a 'cross channel intervention'... but there was also some news that is disturbing for entirely different reasons."

"Are you sure I should be told this information, sir?"

The elder Delacour looked Harry in the eyes for a moment. Harry waited.

"I trust you, Harry. I trust you with my daughter... I trust you with my family... I trust you with the welfare of my country. You have proved yourself capable of great things when given the time, knowledge and opportunity to act." Harry's ghostly form shivered as he remembered

a man who expected great things from a then eleven year old boy. "I hope that by giving you this information, you might be able to help us solve a riddle that involves you personally."

Alain stood and began to pace. "You see Harry, among the scores Azkaban inmates we identified, at least ten wizards and witches that we expected to find were no longer there."

"Did they die on the island, sir?"

"If only that were the case. Dolohov. The Lestranges. Rookwood. Do these names mean anything to you, Harry?" Harry shook his head. "Then Hogwarts is failing to teach even recent English magical history and Albus Dumbledore has failed you personally. You of all people should know why your parents died... but that is for another day. You see, I have told your stories as well as those told by Hermione to my fellow Ministry officials and we began to see a pattern... a rather disturbing one at that. Many looked for evidence to refute your stories only to find more proof, however hidden, that everything you said was true.

"Let's look at the facts as they appear now. First. Fourteen years ago, your parents die and so does Dark Lord Voldemort. By your own memories, we learn he was after you and not your parents. Second. In your first year of magical schooling, you face the spirit of that same Dark Lord as he attempts to regain a body. Third. In your very next year, you face a shade of the same wizard once again even if it is only a memory from his youth. The boys in Research are particularly disturbed by that one, strangely enough. Fourth. The Dark Mark is cast at the World Cup before your fourth year. Death Eaters are seen walking openly on English soil after hiding for more than ten years. Fifth. Someone manages to get you killed in a tournament you were not old enough to enter. Sixth. The Final Task is an ambush for the remaining Champions. We still don't know who or what was responsible, but the odds of there being a connection to your death are quite good. Seventh. The very dark wizards who bribed their way out of Azkaban years ago are now in control of England's magical government. Eighth. We take Azkaban only to find the innocent imprisoned and the guilty missing. We still don't have a clear picture of what this all means, Harry, but we do have some ideas and I for one am disturbed by all of them."

Alain took a moment to collect himself. Harry saw his opportunity to interject and took it.

"Would you mind telling me what you think is happening, sir?"

"It is possible that Voldemort or his supporters are working to regain what they lost when you defeated the man as a small child. He wanted revenge... and now you are dead. He espoused the beliefs of the English pureblood dark houses... and now look at who runs the English Ministry. We also received word that Minister Malfoy has yet to appear before the Prime Minister, Sir John Major, something he is required to do by law. Whether they admit to it or not, I believe Magical England is now well and truly dark."

"You think Voldemort is back, then?" Alain watched Harry as he asked his question. The boy seemed so calm. Was it a side effect of death or the simple fact that so much has already happened to him? Was he simply used to it?

"That is what I fear. And I am not alone in fearing this, Harry." Alain's eyes swept quickly over the reports on his desk before returning to Harry. "The raid on Azkaban taught us much. Plans are being made. The I.C.W. cannot allow England to continue along the path it is currently on."

"What are they going to do?"

"Even I am not allowed to know that, Harry. I am a policeman and a politician, but I am not a soldier. I just do what I can for my family and for my country."

Harry got out of his chair and looked out the window behind Alain's desk. Outside, Paris basked in the late morning sun as puffy clouds rolled overhead.

"I'll do what I can to help, sir. I want what's best for my family and my country- well, my two countries."

His two countries. Alain couldn't help but smile. If only the boy weren't dead...

"I... I do have one thing I need your advice on." Harry stuttered out.

"Anything, Harry. I'll help you in any way I can."

"Well, Hermione's finally noticed that I disappear every once in a while and I'm not sure how long I can keep it from her anymore. I understand about keeping secrets sir, but 'Mione's scary good at figuring things out and it was hard enough to keep her in the dark when she spent most of her time at Beauxbatons." Harry scratched at his forehead in frustration. "I don't like keeping things from her... she deserves better..."

"Let me handle it, Harry. I'll pull her aside soon. I promise to take full responsibility."

A soft chime sounded in the background prompting Alain to step behind his desk and organize a little.

"And now, the two of us have an appointment with a young lady in the medical ward. Come, Harry. We may not be able to let Hermione in on the secret today, but we can give her a new puzzle to occupy herself with over the holidays."

Nodding, Harry slipped behind Alain and the two left his office together.

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"Mum!"

Hermione stepped up to her mother and hugged the woman as tightly as she could. The happy reunion was followed shortly by another with Hermione and her father.

"How was Beauxbatons, dear? Does the school still agree with you?"

"Yes Mum. Short of having Harry in the chair next to me every class, I can't imagine school getting any better."

Hermione broke away from her father to greet Apolline and Gabby who were also waiting in the foyer for her. After a warm hug and some cheek busing with Apolline, Hermione pulled Gabby into a hug that turned into a shriek filled tickle war.

"Hermione dear, please stop before we all go deaf." Emma called out while trying to clear the ringing tone out of her ears.

"You should know dear that Misses McGonagall regretfully declined to spend Christmas dinner with us. She may get to spend a day or two visiting before you return to class, but I believe her clan intends to sneak her back home for the holidays through Ireland." Apolline led everyone into a lounge where drinks could be served. "Nathalie and Sirius also plan on spending much of their holidays with us thought they do have some parties and balls to attend..."

Apolline's speech drifted off as Zoé and Virginie began to serve drinks, but Daniel and Emma both caught her pause. It was their turn to make an announcement.

"Hermione, your father and I have a bit of an announcement to make." Emma turned to make sure that Daniel was okay with her timing. He was.

"What is it, Mum?" The brown haired witch turned around. She was beginning to look around for Harry. Honestly, she didn't expect him to miss something like her return to the Delacour house.

"Well... you know of course that we found it quite impossible to give you a sibling to play with after you were born, though we did originally want to have a larger family... (Emma saw Hermione's eyes widen significantly) I'm not saying we're pregnant again dear!"

Now Hermione was plain confused. Her mother continued.

"Anyway, we wanted a larger family but couldn't get one the natural way and so we put quite a lot of effort into being the best parents we could be for you. Now recently, we've been putting together a dental practice near Marseille due to this whole Dark Britain scandal. While business is growing, I find that Dan spends more time in the office than I do and I've been doing a bit of volunteer work at a local magical orphanage."

Now Hermione shot her mother a 'who are you and where is my real mother' look.

"I know, dear... but the children are too young to practice magic and I can't do it either, so we're all on the same level. They tend to like

me better than the witch caregivers actually." Emma was actually rather proud of that distinction. "It helps that house elves do most of the menial tasks, whole days will go by where not a wand is waved... but I digress. You see, the local magical Department of Education noticed that I was a good influence on their younger generations, and that I was English, and a whole new opportunity came up that I think you will approve of."

"Mum?" It was beginning to sound like her mum just went out to the local market and bought some new magic flavored human and that really didn't make sense. Would France hand over care of a French citizen to an English ex-pat?

Emma moved over and sat down on the same couch that Hermione was on. "Sweetheart, Alain and Harry are at the Ministry offices right this moment preparing a special young lady for her holiday stay with us. Tell me... while you were at Hogwarts, did you ever talk to a girl named Luna Lovegood?"

Hermione slowly shook her head. Mum knew a Hogwarts student that Hermione didn't know? How could that be... and why is Harry with Alain and this Lovegood girl? Hermione needed time to organize all of the questions popping into her head, but her mum made it sound like any minute a girl from Hogwarts would-

"Hullo, Hermione Granger."

Hermione turned to the new voice. There was her Harry, and to his side was Alain. Between the two males, a girl with dirty blonde hair and silvery grey eyes stared dreamily into the center of the room.

"You've got a lovely family, Hermione. Would you mind sharing? I find myself oddly lacking. I think it's because the prison guards took away my necklace. I find butterbeer corks beneficial in maintaining family harmony."

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"So, where do you want me to stand?" Fleur asked over her shoulder.

Behind Fleur, Marion looked over her journal and arithmancy notes in the noonday sun. It was cold, but the sky was cloud free and she could see for miles in every direction.

"Two paces from that wall should do... and please face the wall." Marion answered. "The triggers all connect to that wall and it has more magic flowing through its bricks than the rest of this site combined."

The wall in question was one of the few brick structures around which rose to its original height and its opposite face was directly exposed to the frozen lake. Fleur wondered if this wall possessed the same kind of portal as could be found at Rue Enchanté in Paris. She heard from Hermione that a similar keyed portal could be found leading to Diagon Alley in London.

"Good." Marion checked her great-grandfather's journal one more time. "You know, the Veela connection makes all of the artwork they found here make sense. If only Granddad were still around... and I weren't sworn to secrecy, of course, he would be thrilled that I finally solved this puzzle."

Fleur was in the right spot. Marion and Segolene were both several paces behind her with wands drawn. Screwing with ancient wards was never a sure thing after all.

"Okay! Whatever it is that you do to access that fire of yours, Fleur, do it. Try not to shoot anything- I think you're just supposed to hold it for a minute."

Fleur took off her coat and concentrated. Enraged Veela came into their birthright rather easily but a calm one had to work at it. Even then, the mental exercise mostly revolved around imagining enemies and what she wanted to do to them.

'Umbridge, you bitch.' Fleur focused on the Senior Undersecretary High Inquisitor. 'Setting dementors on my little sister... you want to see a demon- I'll show you a fucking demon!'

Fleur's heart rate rapidly doubled, her breathing went shallow and her fingers began flexing as though she wanted to sink a set of claws into the frumpy British witch. Beneath beautiful crystal blue eyes, Fleur's perfect nose began to shift and stretch. Her pouty lips

went pencil thin and then drew into a sharp beak. Legendary Veela beauty melted away in favor of the fearsome visage reviled by men for thousands of years. But the beak of an angry Veela was only half the change. On Fleur's back, a pair of bat-like leathery wings slipped through narrow tailored slits in Fleur's shirt. The silver-blond Veela may not have transformed in anger in months, but that didn't mean she was ill prepared.

With an instinctive shriek which unsettled Segolene and made Marion step back in fear, Fleur drew her left hand high into the air above her. Focusing her hate of Dolores Umbridge into a single point in front of her open left palm, she summoned red flames.

"It's working!" Marion yelled, causing an angry Veela to turn and glare in her direction. Luckily, she did not lash out at the cursebreaker.

But Marion was right. It was working. Thousands of short glowing lines began to emerge from the cracks between brick and mortar and snow. Soon, the lines began to connect in a clearly female human shape with two sets of wings superimposed on each other: one set with feathers and one without. As Veela and witch stared at the wall in excitement, a pair of arched lines appeared in the form of a door frame three meters high. Marion abandoned her safe distance to run up and stare at the compact lines of ancient script that followed the frame from one side to the other. If she could just get hold of a pensive later... why didn't she bring a camera? Damn!

Both Fleur and Marion jumped back as bricks began to tumble away from a central point. Rue Enchanté indeed. Clearly the brick door trick was very old and very common magic. The effect was shocking enough for Fleur to lose the globe of fire she had been holding aloft, though luckily that did not stop or reverse what was happening.

The arch began to take form as a real portal. Dust and snow fell or was thrown to the ground. As the last brick slid into its final position, the glowing orange lines and letters began to fade from view. Now, there was something new to hold their attention.

Two statues... both women and both armed with short spears... stood just beyond the open portal. Two life sized statues, and both

of them were moving. Fleur was so startled that she lost her transformation.

None of the three witches moved as the statues slowly stalked out of the brick archway and took up guard positions to either side. Cold stone eyes continued to pierce the young women, but neither sentry made any threatening moves. Slowly, the two statues drew their gazes off of the three living witches and came to rest.

Fleur stood quietly before the portal for a full minute waiting for the guardian statues to make a move, but they didn't. As lifelike as they were before, all signs of life were now absent. Finally, she felt safe enough to step between them and into the open space beyond.

"Oh, my God!" Fleur whispered. A surprised hiss came from behind her.

"Why didn't we see that thing before?" Marion said with a hint of wonder.

They were standing on a small pier extending into the lake's ice; a pier that they did not see before in the two days up to this point even though they were within spitting distance more than once. It wasn't the pier that had everyone's attention.

In the center of the frozen lake was an island that lay hidden from view until now.

"Must be a variation of the Fidelius Charm... or perhaps this is the magic that the Fidelius came from." Marion called out. "I've seen things like this before, but it's usually a secret room inside of a tomb, not a secret island on a lake."

But it wasn't just the island itself. On the island was a great stone temple in classical Greek style with a full wraparound colonnade and central core. Unlike the collapsing brick walls of the deserted settlement on the lake shore, this temple was undamaged and clearly made of polished stone just like the guardian statues behind them. The island seemed to have its own statues, too. Though it was still hard to tell from this distance, each of those stone guardians appeared quite a bit bigger than the gate sentries... and they had enormous lances... and wings.

"Are you looking for some lost relic, Fleur?" Marion asked. "The three of us will never be able to do a full survey of this site, let alone document what we find here, unless you organize a real archeological expedition to come back and do a very methodical search of the entire island."

"My grand-mère will be more than pleased to 'ear zat we have opened ze doors to our ancestors' temple for ze first time in zree 'undred years... but zat is not why we came. We seek knowledge zat was lost when my sisters were scattered to ze winds by self-righteous priests and greedy lustful wizards." Fleur's gaze tried to burn through the outer colonnade to the secrets hidden within. "My sister Gabrielle is different from ze rest of our family and we do not know why. I 'ope to find answers in zat building."

"Oh, right... those news stories about Gabrielle being an angel... those were real?" Marion asked. "I mean... sure, I've seen some weird shit in Africa, and some of it was pretty Old Testament too... but a living angel?"

"Yes." Fleur shook her initial elation off. "Shall we go? Ze answers do not come to us, no?"

"Just a second... let me do another search for wards over the water." Marion said.

The American witch lifted her wand and began a series of movements that she knew by heart, blindfolded and backwards only to stop and frown half way through. She looked at her wand oddly for a moment before trying again.

"Girls. Can you two try to cast something? Anything, doesn't matter what." Marion asked while pushing her wand through the motions of half a dozen different spells.

Nothing was happening. Concerned, Fleur and Segolene both brought their wands out and tried to cast various charms and transfigurations. They met with similar failure.

"Fleur, be a dear and try casting on the other side of the door again, will you?" Marion called.

A somewhat nervous Veela stepped back through the portal and cast Lumos. It worked. Stupefy shot out of her wand and splashed harmlessly against a brick face twenty meters away. Three transfigured squirrels ran off in search of nuts. Confident that she hadn't been rendered a squib, Fleur re-entered the portal and tried casting Lumos again. Nothing.

"Let me guess. We'll be walking across, right?" Segolene asked. She was beginning to rub her hand over her arms not that all of her warming charms were defunct.

"Wait." Marion warned. "Let me chuck a rock out there first. I don't like the idea of dying from drowning or hypothermia."

Nodding their acceptance, the other two watched as Marion picked up a rather heavy looking stone and hurled it as far onto the ice as she could.

Thunk

Ice fractured directly under the corner of stone as it hit, but otherwise the stone bounced and rolled with no ill effects. Agreeing that this was about as good as they were going to get in the way of a strength test, the three witches agreed to carefully study the ice as they walked over it and turn around if they saw any thin spots ahead of them. Worst case scenario... Fleur could spread her wings and make the trek alone, taking a sketchbook along with her as Segolene and Marion looked for other ways across.

The walk across the lake took ten minutes, if that, though in future re-tellings Segolene would say it was the longest and most tense walk of her life. Crossing a frozen lake without a heavy coat was bad enough. Crossing it without magic was filling her mind with all manner of quick and deadly tragedies.

Fleur was the first one to reach the other shore. Stepping past a small boat locked in the winter freeze, they would not be using that vessel for their return trip. Fleur did wonder how the wooden vessel with natural rope tied to the island's cut stone dock managed to survive at all... it looked worn in places but otherwise serviceable.

Noticing Fleur's confusion, Marion drew her wand.

"Lumos." Nothing.

"Per'aps ozzier forces are at work? Little Angel may not know what she's doing, but she took 'erself from 'ogwarts to Paris wiz no trouble." Fleur reasoned.

Ignoring the dock for now, Fleur, Segolene and Marion all turned to the temple and took in the details now that there wasn't a lake in front of it. The front face of the temple appeared to be thirty or forty meters wide and as high as fifteen meters at the roof ridge. Above four smooth round columns, a long row of carved female figures enacted scenes which meant nothing to any of the living females present. There were scenes of peace and prosperity, scenes of romance (and a graphic sexual reference or three) and strife. Without fail, each scene of strife involved winged Veela battling males. Then there were the guardian statues. Two great stone Veela, each as high at their folded wings as the temple was tall, stood guard at the front steps. These two statues appeared inert, yet the three explorers knew better than to assume that two giant Veela with twelve meter long spears were harmless.

Soft snow and frozen grass crunched underfoot as Fleur once more lead the way from dock to steps and between the massive columns.

"Let me guess," Segolene said to Fleur as she took in the entry vestibule, "Your ancestors didn't build this temple themselves, did they?"

Fleur ignored the question in favor of taking in a series of relief sculptures adorning the walls. There were two more life sized statues in guard position on either side of a stone filled doorway. While these two did have short spears like their sisters back on the opposite shore, they were the first to be clad in a rather liberal amount of golden plate armor and they also sported the wings and beaks of Veela

"Please. 'ave you ever met a Veela zat you zink would willingly spend 'er life beating on rocks wiz a chisel? No, ze are far more likely to recline and allow ozzers to make statues in zer likeness." Fleur almost rolled her eyes during the explanation.

"But Gabby is a fine young artist." Segolene countered. "I may not have seen her sculpt, but she has a good eye for color and her watercolors show great promise."

"Zere is a difference between artists and craftsmen, Segolene, and even zen boz of zose professions require long hours and hard work if you do it to feed your family and pay the landlord. Veela prefer to laze about and tell men what to do. Traditionally, they 'ave been called muses or goddesses or spirits of beauty and passion. Ze only resort to getting zier 'ands dirty when necessary, like when ze only ozzer option is to burn at ze stake."

"You don't seem to have a very high opinion of your own race, Miss Delacour." Marion commented.

"Zat is not true." Fleur turned away from the priceless art and architecture around them to rebut. "Veela are not meant to work the plow; zey are meant to inspire. Zey are ze inspiration behind many great men. When one great man cannot be found, Veela inspire whole nations. We may 'ave lost most of our 'history, but some great Veela will never be forgotten. Venus and Aphrodite... and yes, ze were mortals before ze were deified... Helen and Cleopatra. Bed ze right man and a Veela can change world 'istory."

Segolene stared at the interior Veela guard statues. "So you're saying that a Veela sexpot went down to Greece, enthralled a few hundred stonemasons and brought them back with her? How good a lay do you have to be for men to build a gold and jewel encrusted temple dedicated to you?"

"She needn't have gone as far as Greece." Marion added. "This is Scythian territory. The Scythians were on good terms with the Greeks for a while, but even then Scythians were as skilled in art and architecture as the Greeks were... not that we hear as much about them in modern history classes."

"So we have Greeks and Scythians trying to outdo each other to win the hand of fair Veela damsels who just want a little temple of their very own..." Segolene returned. "Shall we try to open the next door? I for one want to see what ancient Veela considered sacred."

Both Fleur and Marion turned to the door in agreement. This time, Marion didn't have to pull out her journal to decipher the unlocking

mechanism; the same imagery found in the journal completely covered the door panel.

"If you would please, Fleur." Marion swept a hand towards the door and Fleur stepped up.

Once again, thoughts of a foul toad woman helped Fleur change from wingless to winged form and call up a ball of Veela fire. This time, the door simply moved to the side within the adjacent wall's thickness.

"So Veela powers work fine but magic is suppressed, huh?" Marion wondered aloud. "Nice security they've got here. I wonder how they did it."

As there was no guardian statue waiting inside, Fleur cautiously slipped through the archway using her fireball as a torch. Behind her, Segolene watched the light of Fleur's fireball pass through the stone archway with growing anxiety.

"Fleur? Fleur, we're coming through."

Putting action to words, she took a step forward. The French brunette's vision suddenly filled with the polished faces of two spear blades.

"Fleur!" Segolene shouted as Marion grabbed her by the shoulders and pulled backwards.

Now Fleur's path seemed blocked as she tried to come back through the archway, though at her presence the stone sentries did slowly unblock the path.

"It would seem that they're a bit more selective about who passes on to the next room." Marion said, trying to maintain control. "Segolene, can you take a few more steps backwards? I'll approach the guards and then we'll see if they stop me as well."

The teen brunette staggered back a few paces before whipping out her wand and desperately trying to get something to work. Facing danger of this magnitude without her magic was fraying the girl's nerves terribly. Her Veela lover stood still, hunched over in the opening with a ball of fire ready to incinerate the next enchanted

object that dare point a weapon at her lover. Marion marshaled her resolve and stepped forward.

Marion didn't proceeded any further than Segolene did before having a pair of blades cross in front of her.

"Well, shit."

Clearly they didn't make the cut. As Segolene and Marion stood in silent contemplation of their problem, Fleur shifted back to her normal form.

"Look..." Marion called as she reached into a deep coat pocket. "Take my light. You can look around this time and we'll come back later with more mundane equipment after we know what to expect."

Marion chucked a blocky fluorescent area light at Fleur who thankfully caught it.

"V- very well." Fleur swallowed.

After turning on the electric lamp, which did still work, Fleur turned around and disappeared from view.

"My God!" Fleur cried as she saw the inner room clearly for the first time.

She barely acknowledged the shouts and questions coming from the outer room now. There was too much... well... shiny gold. Too many ancient offerings of gold and precious jewels that were never found by invading hordes. Fleur knew as well as any Veela how easy it was to get a man to throw gold and jewels at her; she didn't know her ancestors were so good at holding onto it. Only after she came to grips with the shiny was Fleur able to see that this room was more than just a treasure house. The walls were practically alive with history. Colorful paintings and intricate wall reveals were intermingled with a written language Fleur didn't recognize. Maybe Marion would know what it was. Marion?

"Marion?" Fleur called back through the open archway. "Zere are paintings, sculptures and a whole written language on ze walls! 'ow do we record it all?"

From the other side, Marion yelled past the guardian statues. "We need to go back for cameras and video equipment, Fleur. The light works so a VHS recorder should too. Wax paper reliefs are probably still best for the writing if it's cut into the stone rather than painted on... Oh! Is there anything in there small enough to take out with us?"

"Over my dead body!" Fleur screamed back. Calming down a little bit, she repeated herself in English.

"Fleur?" Segolene's voice floated through the archway.

Fleur calmed down just enough to avoid changing again.

"I am ze first Veela to enter my ancestral temple... my Church... in zree 'undred years and you want me to loot it?"

"Oh, umn... sorry about that." Marion did sound sorry at least. Her grand-dad would have tried to explain why it all belongs in a museum right about now. Then again, Marion was pretty sure he never had to deal with angry Veela.

Turning back around to take it all in, Fleur spotted something else she hadn't noticed before then. Another statue... and another door. She drew closer to it in amazement. Not since the secret brick door has she noticed the second theme, the more important theme, until now. Two meters from the back wall, a statue knelt down with her arms raised high in supplication. She was no common Veela... she was an angel. By Jeanne, were it not for the ancient dress she wore and the slight traces of yellow and green on her wingtips, Fleur would swear this was a statue of Gabby herself. The angel's worshipful pose was not focused on the room's center but the back wall and a new stone filled doorway.

And where the last door Fleur opened had a Veela and her fire as the central theme, this door featured a pair of raised feathery wings bracketing a halo.

Fleur initiated the change... a change that took three times longer than the other two combined as it was hard to generate feelings of rage in her people's most holy of places... and she summoned the fire which served her so well twice in the last hour.

Nothing, not that she expected it to work anyway.

"I... I don't think I can open this last door..." Fleur got out at last.

"What was that Fleur!" Marion called back.

Spent, Fleur drifted back towards the doorway and her fellow explorers.

"Ze last door... I cannot open it." She repeated.

"There's another door?" Marion's comment only narrowly beat Segolene's, "You can't open it?"

Fleur slowly walked back out of the treasure room and over to her two companions. So deep in thought was she that Fleur ignored Marion's protest when the stone door slid shut behind her. Finally, she looked up into Segolene's eyes.

"Grand-mère will be very pleased wiz what we 'ave found, but Maman will not like what we must do next." Silence greeted her statement. She continued. "We are so close to finding answers, I am sure of it... but I fear Little Angel will 'ave to open zat last door 'erself. It is not keyed to Veela, it is keyed to angels."

With Fleur lost in thought and Segolene showing signs of being just a bit overwhelmed and hypothermic, Marion made a command decision.

"Let's get back to camp, girls. The sun is going down and it's only going to get colder. We need those warming charms back soon." The cursbreaking archeologist stepped past two teens and walked briskly out to the lake. "We can put together a list of equipment to bring with us tomorrow morning. Most of it should be at camp and we can buy what we don't have from that village the Volk sisters live in. Come on, girls."

Finally, Fleur snapped out of it and turned to follow Marion. "I need to write Maman a letter. She must be told how close we are... and what it will take to finish the job."

Segolene grunted in approval and then pulled tight against Fleur to share warmth on their way back across the lake. Now that the

temple was behind them, Segolene could focus on something a bit more important than gold, statues and ancient history... silk was out of the question for tomorrow.

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"I hereby call this meeting of the Girls Who Have Been Personally Saved By Harry Potter to order." Hermione called pretentiously.

Gabby giggled.

"What?" Hermione huffed.

"You sound like Pappa when he's at work!"

"Your father sounds like a young witch when he's out ordering people about?" Luna wondered aloud. "How odd."

Hermione tried to maintain her persona as the overly official club president (and founding/charter member) but she could not hold in her smile forever.

The three girls were in the middle of Gabby's bed in their night things, having agreed to a slumber party celebrating Luna's admission to the Granger family. On the door, in pink tempera paint, was a still wet sign boldly declaring (with little flowers and hearts and such) that no boys were allowed. There was of course a line of fine print voiding the ban as soon as Gabrielle fell asleep.

"Enough giggling, Miss Delacour." Hermione censured, beating a biscuit on her pillow like a judge's gavel, "We have new business to discuss."

After a few more titters and some light scolding, Hermione soldiered on.

"I have here in my hand a petition to the club council," Hermione looked down at the crayon script on a cloth napkin, "stating that Miss Luna Lovegood should be granted membership in this esteemed body."

Gabby nodded dutifully. Hermione told her exactly what to write not half an hour ago. They had plenty of parchment on hand, normal

paper too, but standard media lacked the flavor of colored wax on pilfered linens.

"All those in favor of the petition?" Hermione asked the room in general.

Three hands shot up.

"Miss Lovegood." Hermione cautioned. "As you are not yet a member of Girls Who Have Been Personally Saved By Harry Potter, you cannot vote."

"I accept your decision, Chairperson Granger. However, I would also like to point out that if Ginny Weasley were present, I'm quite certain that she would vote in my favor." Luna replied.

Gabby looked at Hermione with a 'who?' face. Luckily, most of the expression was based on eyebrow shape as her biscuit stuffed cheeks did not help.

"Harry saved her from the snake and Tom Riddle as a Second Year."

Gabby's 'ohhhhhhhhhh, okay' face was followed by vigorous nodding and a shower of crumbs.

"Let the record show that Miss Weasley's absentee vote was cast in favor of Miss Lovegood. All opposed?"

Gabby and Hermione both failed to see any hands raised.

"You better hush!" Luna hissed to the side.

Gabby and Hermione both turned in surprise only to find nothing there.

"Let's call that one an abstention, shall we?" Hermione offered. "Very well. The chair welcomes Miss Lovegood into Girls Who Have Been Personally Saved By Harry Potter. Congratulations, Miss Lovegood!"

Hermione and Gabby both clapped for their newest club member. Luna was feeling quite pleasant.

"I accept Harry Potter as my personal Lord and savior!" She crowed.

Gabby tittered at the blonde's declaration while Hermione choked on her tea.

"I d -cough- don't think the Potters were ever -hack- members of the peerage, Luna."

"Well how does one get their own angel if they are not a Lord?" Luna challenged.

"Gabby." Hermione turned to the nine year old in question. "Are you Harry's angel?"

"Yes!" Gabby sure was, and she was proud of it.

Hermione crossed her arms in a huff.

"Face it, Chairperson Granger." Luna called. "You've been out voted."

Surely there was a rule against wining arguments with the Chairlady on a member's first night, wasn't there? There should be. Hermione made a note to review... and if necessary revise... the Club Charter.

"On to the next order of business then." Hermione chose to move past her procedural failure and bring up an important topic. "I am told that we will be getting some rather important visitors for Christmas dinner this year."

That got the attention of the other two girls rather quickly.

"Honorary Adult Member Madame Delacour has informed me that we are to be hosting Sirius and Nathalie starting tomorrow... and as far as we know Fleur and Segolene will be returning for at least one day. They have portkeys arranged, at least." Hermione paused. "Also, Victor Krum has agreed to ring in the New Year with us even if he is unable to attend our Christmas dinner plans."

Gabby brightened up. "Will he bring presents? When Cedric visited, he brought me a present."

"Will he be as good looking this time as he was when he took you to the ball?" Luna asked Hermione.

Hermione blushed feeling quite scandalized. Luna felt obliged to continue.

"Do you know how many girls plotted to hex you for catching the Durmstrang Champion's eye? I heard at least twelve different plots against you on the first day of class after Yule break and I can't imagine myself having caught whispers of more than one in every eight fiendish plans hatched... probably less than one in twelve."

"Well I didn't get hexed that I recall, thank you very much." Desperately trying to avoid the subject of Bulgarian seekers, Hermione remembered who else would be attending. "Speaking of seekers who aren't Harry, I overheard your mother and father discussing a few more possible guests, Gabby. Cedric may be visiting with the Bones family."

"I know Susan, she's quite kind." Luna supplied. "She helped treat my cuts before Harry rescued me. Hufflepuffs were far more helpful than my housemates as a whole. In fact, I find it quite odd that wrackspurts tend to seek out Ravenclaw students before Hufflepuffs... do you think puffs eat more radishes on average? That might explain things."

Hermione was lost, but her distraction worked so she could still call it a victory.

All in all, Hermione was quite content with the status quo. While she wouldn't get to spend time with any relatives, she wasn't terribly close to her cousins and the older generations typically spend most of their holiday drinking heavily and reminiscing about the good old days. Here in the South of France, she had her parents, Harry, the Delacours and Royals... and now she had a little sister. Granted, Mum didn't come by her the natural way, but beggars can't be choosers. As... eccentric... as Luna was, Hermione was certain she could have done a lot worse.

Hermione caught Gabby yawning and the girls slipped under covers for the night. The girls only rule expired. That night in their dreams, Gabby and Hermione constantly argued Harry's Lordly qualities much to the boy's utter embarrassment. One quilt over, Luna hosted

a dreamworld party of her own. Having her Mum and Dad back together, even in death, warmed her heart to no end. Perhaps if she took big sister Hermione's advice to heart she might be able to remember more than just a smile here and a hug there come morning.

End Chapter

Chapter Sixteen: New Religion

Albus allowed his mind to wander and his gaze to once more settle on the half books Miss Delacour magically sectioned last August.

Where did it all go wrong? Was his first mistake not properly reigning in key figures after the chaos of the Third Task? It was true that the Second Task ended in tragedy but Albus has known since Sirius Black's hearing in June that the prophecy is still in play.

A soft trill filled the room and the old wizard found himself revitalized. He looked over to the phoenix on its stand of gold and smiled.

"Fawkes. What would I do without you?" He turned back to his desk and the assorted letters and missives covering it. "You are right, of course... I was falling to despair again."

Albus took heart. The prophecy, as muggles are wont to say, 'worked in mysterious ways'. He could not allow himself to doubt the prophecy's meaning but recent history was still playing tricks with him. Harry Potter was the one... Neville may have been an option that night but he was not marked like Harry was.

...for neither can live while the other survives...

Tom Riddle couldn't live... couldn't take a physical form... when Harry survived Halloween night. Soon after Harry fell in the Second Task, Tom took physical form again. Now Harry roams the mortal plane in spirit form and Tom walks the Earth as flesh and blood, rebuilding his once formidable forces.

If Tom lost his body again, could someone resurrect Harry? Who? Historically, only dark wizards of Voldemort's caliber even knew how.

...and either must die at the hand of the other...

This part was really giving Albus fits recently. Harry died, did he not? Unlike Voldemort, there was a body to bury after the second task. But... could one consider death by merman spear to be 'at the hand of' Tom? At Bern, Albus believed that Gabrielle was given both Harry's power and his destiny... but Albus may have been too hasty. Claiming Gabrielle could 'tag in' to take Harry's place was too loose

an interpretation now that he had more time and more information to go by. Voldemort never marked Gabrielle.

Albus paused, taking a sip of wine. As his eyes once again swept over his damaged book collection, he noticed the size and coloring of one of them in particular. Damn. Damn! With a burst of inspiration Albus desperately wished he could disprove, he came up with a new interpretation of the prophecy.

In Nineteen ninety-one, Voldemort tried to take human form only to be denied by Harry in a direct battle. The very next year, Tom Riddle's diary tried and failed to give him a new body... once again due to Harry's direct physical interference. Earlier this year, Harry's spirit fled his body and Tom finally achieved his goal. Tom clearly knows how to regain his form and with Harry straying onto the path of darkness, he may well discover how to do so as well. A Could it be that the prophecy describes an endless loop of banishment and rebirth? Could Harry and Tom both be doomed to repeat the cycle unless one finally kills the other by his own hand? If only the boy had stuck to Albus's script... yes, even by letting the little Veela die... then Albus could have set Tom and Harry up in a foolproof checkmate scenario.

Old fingers slid along pages whose binding was cut free. The Headmaster pulled, causing a pile of loose half-pages to tumble on the floor along with what remained of their shabby black cover. The cut sheets were unique amongst his collection in that they were devoid of all writing. The only clues as to what the book had once been were a few letters on the front and a rather ugly hole which pierced the cover. The letters? "iddle"

They were, of course, the end of a name; the name of the student who's diary it was. T. M. Riddle. This was the very same book from which a shadowy echo of Lord Voldemort took possession of Ginny Weasley only to have Harry destroy the diary, kill a basilisk and save a young witch.

And now Albus Percival Wulfric Brian Dumbledore was absolutely certain he knew what the diary really was. It once held a part of Tom's very soul and it was this soul fragment, this horcrux, that Harry had released... or perhaps even destroyed outright... with the help of a basilisk fang. This foul, dark magic prevented Tom from passing on when he was first ejected from his body by the baby

Harry Potter. And worse... Albus now knew that Voldemort made more than one of the abominations. After all, Tom didn't pass on to the next Great Adventure as soon as Harry destroyed the diary, did he?

He looked over the remains of Riddle's diary and contemplated the idea that Tom wasn't alone in his possession of soul containers. Why else would Harry be turning dark unless there was an unnatural influence on him? Throughout the boy's life, he lived under the shadow of Tom Riddle, the scar on his forehead seemed a badge of courage to Albus and the rest of the Wizarding World, not that Harry himself would admit to it. He was such a humble boy... but Albus was hesitant to officially allow Lily Potter too much credit lest her use of blood magic be accepted by the Wizarding World as an example to live up to. No. Let her sacrifice be noted, but do not let the details be known. Harry Potter... Boy-Who-Lived... let him receive the accolades for his most noble if unwitting defeat of a Dark Lord.

Albus lost the good cheer given to him by Fawkes as he pondered Harry's new dark path. Fighting. Killing. Where was the love? The forgiveness? How could Harry or his 'Little Angel' ever see the path of light and goodness if they did not give their foes the chance to repent? Didn't Christianity promote turning the other cheek? Harry was dutifully following that path in life... Albus was sure of it. All of the rules, controls and restrictions on Harry were designed to ensure this after all. The boy's darker tendencies only revealed themselves upon his death and spectral rebirth; a change that coincided with his release from the carefully controlled environments of Privet Drive and Hogwarts.

In the Headmaster's mind there was but one reason this could be so. Harry had his own dark soul fragment and it was now affecting his actions. Or was there a horcrux affecting the Boy-Who-Lived even earlier than that? According to his research, Harry could have unknowingly done the deed several times in his life. The ritual to create a soul fragment needs sacrifice of life, sacrifice of blood and sacrifice of magic; add the right intent to that powerful mix and one could achieve immortality after a fashion. It could have happened the night Voldemort was first defeated... or it could have happened the night Harry burned Voldemort out of Quirrel's body... or it could have happened the very moment Harry died.

Of those three candidates, the best in Albus's mind was the most recent. Gabrielle did survive an attack that by all rights should have killed her. More than that, the little French girl received Harry's fluency in English much as Harry received Tom's parseltongue abilities. Albus now knew that Harry's lightning bolt shaped scar was a soul container, ergo Gabrielle's mark on her forehead was one as well.

Unfortunately, Gabrielle played the innocent angel act rather well. She may even believe her own act. To date, her only slip-ups occurred when her life was threatened, but in those circumstances the little girl was clearly willing to kill.

And all of this stemmed from Harry's willing sacrifice? It went against Albus's general understanding of magic. More likely the young Veela suffered a bit of 'accidental' magic and enthralled Harry thus forcing him into the sacrifice on false pretenses. Still, were it not for the few overt violent acts perpetrated by Harry and Gabrielle, Albus would almost think this soul connection benevolent... but that was foolishness. He knew blood magic could never be light no matter the circumstances.

Albus could at least take heart that the girl was unlikely to be the substitute child-of-prophecy he once thought her to be. She would not have to die. She would, however, have to be taken out of general circulation and subjected to controls even more stringent than those young Harry was required to endure.

"What was the muggle fairytale term again? 'The highest room in the tallest tower', wasn't it?" Albus asked the near empty office. Fawkes chirped in confusion. "Even now, I can only hope to safeguard Gabrielle until after Harry and Tom sort themselves out. If I can manage to free her of dark magic's taint I will, but until that happens she shall have to wait patiently... and in ignorance. Perhaps having her take the Draught of Living Death first would be the most humane way to handle things..."

Once more, birdsong filled the room though it was less encouraging and more critical.

"If only I could be so sure of young Gabrielle's heart."

Fawkes immediately replied with a quick string of chirps and clicks. A rebuke!

Albus looked away from his familiar. "She and Harry are connected in a way that can only be achieved by dark means."

A second, equally forceful rebuke came from his familiar.

"Fawkes, please. How can you approve of their bond when you recoil at blood wards? Is the ward not the lesser evil?"

The magical bird launched into a long and rapid song, surely one of the more complicated Albus had ever heard. Unfortunately, it was far too complicated. Albus only understood that Fawkes disagreed with him once more.

"I truly wish I had your confidence, dear friend," Albus replied, "but there is now far too much at stake. Miss Delacour is far too vulnerable with her connection to Mister Potter and I cannot properly guide them from a distance. The prophecy has no true end condition unless I take fate by the horns and end it myself."

Here Albus stopped. He could go no further. His immense magical knowledge had finally failed him and he needed a distraction.

Albus picked up a sheet of parchment, and reread the message from Mr. Creevey demanding his children be returned home. Funny how it was written on parchment in uneven calligraphy. And it read like a Sixth Year Slytherin's idea of how muggles might go about pulling their children from school, as well. As this was obviously not an original, Albus planned to have an associate of his make a discreet inquiry at the Creevey household to see how things were going. Just because the Ministry hasn't sent anyone to muggleborn students' houses yet didn't mean that they never would.

The aging Headmaster was about to ink a polite refusal when his office door ward activated.

"Come in, Severus." Albus called.

As soon as the door creaked open, Fawkes let out a harsh squawk and flashed out of the office. The Potions Master took a seat without prompting and waited for his host to address him once more.

Fawkes' dislike of Severus and his dark magic arm was simply accepted and no longer worth mentioning.

"And how was tea with Minister Malfoy?" Albus asked as his quill slid and hopped over the parchment's surface.

"Things were well for a time..." Snape replied in a flat emotionless tone. "Discussing potions with Narcissa is always a pleasant way to pass time and Draco is taking after his mother in this field."

"Yes, I seem to remember Lucius not being all that successful in the class." Albus lowered his quill and cast his sparkling gaze to his guest.

"You remember correctly." Snape replied. "How he achieved an O on his Potion's N.E.W.T., I'll never know."

"Not that I can prove it, but I suspect polyjuice was involved. Another student may have taken the exam twice."

Severus snorted at the Headmaster's suggestion, dismissing the allegation without bothering with proof one way or another. "I was half way through instructing Draco on the less well known uses for poppies when an uninvited guest interrupted our discourse."

"Voldemort?" Albus asked.

Severus sneered. "One does not tell the Dark Lord he is unwelcome and expect to live. No, I mean to say that toad of a woman Umbridge."

Albus had to smile at that. Someone was getting rubbed the wrong way by Madam Umbridge and it wasn't him.

"If the woman weren't so useful to him, Lucius would have Crucio'd her on the spot."

"But she is useful to him. She keeps me occupied." Albus looked back at his stack of legal notices and official Ministry requests. Nine out of ten were written by dear Dolores.

"She had another plan to get you arrested." Snape returned.

"Oh? How did she plan on doing it this time?" This wasn't her first attempt, but even as weakened as Albus was politically, he was still quite influential.

"Since you refused to release all muggleborn students for Christmas Holiday after she expelled them en mass, she is sure that can be used as an excuse to have you arrested for defying Ministry authority."

"But surely Lucius would have had aurors beating on the door last week were that the case."

"Yes, well she wanted to track down every muggleborn at home and take their wands herself before coming after you with an auror escort."

"She didn't count on my being the magical guardian of every underage muggleborn in England, did she?"

"Nor did she consider that you might use that status to keep all muggleborns in the school indefinitely. She got tired of waiting and asked Lucius for permission to come after you."

"Are you here to arrest me, Severus?" Albus looked up from his paperwork.

"Of course not." Severus sneered and crossed his arms. "Lucius wants you here where he can check in on you from time to time. Dolores was put in her place and sent away with her tail between her legs."

"So Tom isn't ready to come to Hogwarts yet..." Albus went fishing.

"Not yet." The Potions Master shifted slightly. "All of his efforts are being directed to another goal."

"Delacour?" Albus asked.

"I believe so. Not that I know the particulars, but he has mentioned on more than one occasion that Christmas Dinner should be quite a show for those who received Malfoy's personal invitation."

Albus let his eyes wander as he considered his options. Once again, Albus cursed the fates for allowing Harry and Gabrielle leave his supervision in the face of such dangerous threats. Two children could not understand how capable Tom Riddle was nor how far his reach extended.

The Headmaster's musing was interrupted when a ghost passed through his door and came to a halt to one side of Professor Snape's chair. The Bloody Baron looked as serious ever and only answered the Headmaster's inquiring gaze with a single nod. Very well.

"If you don't mind, Severus, it would appear that my presence is required elsewhere."

"Very well, Headmaster. I have cauldrons that need attention."

Severus stood and left the office after a brief nod. Albus gave his Slytherin Head of House a head start before leaving the confines of his office for a rather pressing engagement.

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"All of them?" Harry asked.

Ginny nodded.

"Yeh, mate." Ron added. "Every muggleborn in Hogwarts was expelled."

"Wands?"

"Headmaster Dumbledore took them into his custody. Umbitch protested but he knows the law better than she does."

Harry glanced past the two Weasleys and over to Myrtle, who was watching the sun rise through her bathroom's window. While his ghost-sister was always happy to see him, she was quite uninterested in the issues Harry kept asking his living friends about. He wondered if she was always this disconnected or if dying caused her to be this way.

"And the school is full of students who couldn't leave even if they wanted to. Well that's one way of keeping them in the Wizarding World I suppose, but it's also kidnapping, isn't it? They can't leave the castle and yet they won't be allowed to attend classes when school resumes."

Harry thought about what Hogwarts would be like if he were stuck in the castle unable to do any magic. Would the Slytherins taunt these unlucky 'guests' about being squibs? Would Albus find some way to keep these expelled students occupied? Would he find a way to reverse Umbridge's expulsions?

"So why are you two here and not at the Burrow?" Harry finally asked the two redheads.

"I knew you'd stop by again. Talking to you is more important than Mum's cooking." Ginny replied.

Ron glared at his sister for a moment before answering Harry. "Mum wasn't happy when Ickle Gin-Gin wrote home to say she was staying here. You should have heard the howler that day... anyway, with Ginny staying here, Mum ordered me to stay with her."

The young witch stepped a little closer to Harry before asking a question. "So how is Luna. You said that they saved her and that the healers released her..."

Harry smiled. "Oh, she's loads better. Hermione's parents are taking care of her... they adopted her, actually... and Hermione's really risen to the challenge of being a big sister."

"I'm quite glad to hear that, my boy."

If there had been any blood in Harry's veins at the moment, it would have just run cold. As it was, the young specter slowly turned around.

"Dumbledore." Harry said, no trace of emotion in his voice.

"Ah-ah, Harry. I'm still Headmaster of this school and I should be addressed as such."

The old man's eyes twinkled madly, not that Harry was in any way impressed. Behind Dumbledore, the Bloody Baron drifted about silently.

"I respected you once, sir, but the more I learn about the real Albus Dumbledore the less respect I have for the legend. Knowing how you treat children like pawns in a deadly chess match makes me wonder if you really are the great wizard people claim you to be or if you're just a magician who specializes in smoke and mirrors."

Albus allowed weary determination to show on his face. "Young man-

Harry cut him off. "What you do, you do for the Greater Good of all Wizard Kind or something or other- Isn't that about right? You do realize that's the first thing all muggle dark lords claim in their rise to power, right? That they're doing it for the Greater Good?"

Harry stared defiantly into the eyes of his former Headmaster as a couple of pale Gryffindors tried very hard not to attract any attention. Myrtle was watching eagerly, she so loved a good show.

"Mister Potter..." Albus maintained his slow steady pace. This time Harry chose not to interrupt. "I trust we will be able to settle our differences over the coming days and weeks in a civilized way."

Harry's gaze slid over the Headmaster... specifically over his empty wand hand.

"I'm not staying here-" Harry started but it was the Headmaster's turn to interrupt.

"I'm afraid you have no choice in the matter, Mister Potter." Albus let a little of his previous good cheer return. "I don't need to be in your presence to lock you into the wards, my boy. I took the sensible route and modified them before coming in to see you."

Harry's mood instantly soured. Without warning he dropped straight through the water soaked floor tiles in Myrtle's bathroom. Albus simply stood there without seeming to acknowledge Harry's departure. Both resident ghosts glanced at each other and then back to the spot Harry just left. Ron and Ginny were both feeling quite out of their depth and terribly worried for their friend.

A few seconds later, just as Ginny was finally ready to voice her anger at the Headmaster's treatment of her personal hero, Harry re-appeared in the center of the bathroom floor.

"Wait- what just-" Harry called out in confusion.

"Oh, Harry!" Myrtle cried. "You moved in!"

The female spirit quickly spun a circle around her new flatmate before stopping again.

"This is the sweetest thing anyone's ever done for me!" Myrtle began giggling in a most un-Moaning Myrtle-ish way.

"You will find, Mister Potter," Albus said, "that you may access any part of the castle any of the other ghosts have access to, but any time you try to cross the ward line, you will appear here in Myrtle's bathroom once again."

"Bloody bastard!"

"Now, now. I assure you that my parents were legally wed long before my birth." Albus responded.

"I know that you don't really want to be here, Harry..." Myrtle said in as sympathetic a tone as she could manage. "But that doesn't mean we can't do things together, does it?"

Harry was on the edge of telling the Headmaster more about how he felt being trapped in Hogwarts grounds when a better idea crossed his mind.

"Myrtle?"

"Yes, Harry?" The deceased Ravenclaw became almost chipper at Harry's call.

"Do you know where I can find Peeves?" The living in the room didn't react, but the Barron's eyes narrowed.

"I- I do! This way!"

Myrtle immediately dove through one of the stalls lining the bathroom's walls. Proving once again that he was a natural seeker, Harry shot off after her. With a huff and a grunt, the Bloody Baron turned to follow Hogwarts' two youngest ghosts intending to find out what they're up to and, if necessary, break it up.

"Why?" Ginny.

"Hogwarts is Harry's true home, Miss Weasley." Albus replied as he reviewed the previous encounter in his mind. "The sooner he accepts that, the better off we will all be."

"You're wrong." Ron muttered.

"I would think you of all people would be happy to see Harry back in Hogwarts, Mister Weasley. You two were best mates, were you not?"

Ron glared but kept his eyes on the floor. "Harry's best mate is at Beauxbatons right now. His family is French. We're mates, but that just means I know what makes Harry happy and right now Hogwarts isn't it."

"I understand you're confusion, Mister Weasley, but I assure you that I do in fact know what is best. Now..." Albus looked between the two Weasleys, settling on Ginny as she was willing to meet his gaze. "if you two would be so kind as to tell me how often you've been meeting Harry here and what it is you've been telling him? As much as Harry made light of it, I do what I do in the best interests of Wizarding England."

Ginny hated appearing weak... especially after her troubles as a First Year... but there was something in the Headmaster's gaze that disturbed her. A familiar feeling behind her eyes...

Her gaze dropped to the floor.

"Have the two of you nothing to say?" Albus prompted.

The siblings stood together in silent protest.

"Your show of loyalty is commendable but I'm afraid in this case it is misplaced. Harry is adrift in this world and has lost his way. I want to

help him, not harm him. May I suggest that the two of you go back to your common room and think about what it is you are doing? We can meet after dinner... in my office. I'm sure you remember the way."

Ron shifted his balance from one foot to the other, but neither he nor his sister made any other form of acknowledgment. The Headmaster turned towards the door, but paused right before stepping out.

"It might interest you to know that I am quite fond of orange sherbert."

And with that, Albus left Ron and Ginny to their own devices.

-o\0/o-

Snow crunched under foot.

Fleur, Segolene and Marion were once again walking across a frozen lake after a quick breakfast. All three were eager to look around today, as yesterday was spent in town collecting supplies and planning out the upcoming survey.

Segolene was excited. She'd never owned a good fur coat before and her mother's was more about form and less about function. This one was both attractive and warm. She'd have to remember that when she was a famous fashion designer.

Fur coats were only a small part of yesterday's trip, though. The three needed a lot of non-magical equipment to get the job done and some of it was hard to find in small Ukrainian villages. The Volk sisters were a big help finding what few extras the girls needed and Marion's local guide was more than willing to sit on his backside with a bottle of Vodka and stay 'on call'. As long as they kept him drunk and paid up in the Veela bar, they could do anything they wanted and he was only too happy to wait for their return.

Today was the day. All of their batteries were charged, they had dozens of 35mm rolls and there was a solid week's worth of tape just waiting to record lost treasures and forgotten languages. Even walking over a lake which may or may not open up and swallow them whole wasn't giving any of the three explorers any anxiety.

Having once again passed the first pair of guardian statues and made their way onto the icy lake, the girls were more than a little surprised when an unexpected light formed only two paces in front of Fleur. Just over head level, the blue-white globe began to expand into a ring and move downward. A long high pitched tone followed the ring down.

Marion went for her gun but Fleur and Segolene were all smiles. The light ring quickly revealed white feathery wings and three figures embracing in the middle of the ring.

"Maman!" Fleur hardly waited for her sister's halo to disappear before rushing forward and embracing all three visitors at once. "Grandmother! Gabrielle, my sweet, how are you?"

A quick flare of pure love and devotion passed through everyone's hearts as Gabby returned her sister's hug with one that included white feathery wings. As three generations of Veela engaged in a group hug, Segolene moved to Marion and picked up the revolver lying at Marion's feet. Miss Jones snapped out of it when her own gun was held in front of her face.

"Marion. This is yours, no?"

As the smug brunette returned Marion's sidearm, she also looked back to the Veela ball which was beginning to break up.

"A lake?" Apolline spoke up. "You called us out here to God only knows where in the middle of winter with your sister whom absolutely must not leave the safety of French aurors for any reason to show us a frozen lake?"

Fleur refused to buckle under her mother's glare. Instead, she looked her mother in the eye and pointed to the left. Fleur's mother and grandmother both turned to look where Fleur was pointing. As the two elder Veela saw- and then openly gaped at- the Veela temple for the first time, Gabrielle pranced over to Segolene and gave her a hug.

"Hello again Little Angel!" Segolene cooed to the angel. "It warms my heart to see you again."

Gabby stepped back and changed back into human form. Her cheeks and nose immediately pinked from the cold.

"I'm cold Momma!" Gabby cried. She was wearing a ski outfit from last winter. It still fit for the most part, but her jacket was still in her hands, not on her body, and there were open cuts in the back of her shirt for wings. Freezing air assaulted Gabby's bare back and caused a wave of goosebumps to appear. "I wish Harry was here."

"Let me help you get that coat on, Little Angel." Segolene offered.

"Harry went off to do some task or other for your father." Apolline explained. "Though I don't know what Alain could possibly have the boy doing that supersedes this."

The Veela mother saw her daughter's saddened face and couldn't help but be moved. "I will have to get the boys to come clean on their little games soon. I understand that they sometimes feel the need to do some male bonding, but I don't like not knowing what it is they do together."

"Thank you, Momma."

As Segolene and Apolline helped Gabby get properly dressed for the climate, Fleur introduced Marion Jones to her family and described why Gabby was needed in the first place. As they talked, the group of Veela and witches once more began to move towards the massive temple which now loomed less than one hundred meters away. After her introductions were over, Marion pulled out a video camera and began recording the approach from frozen lake to island shore.

For the first time, Fleur recounted the events of their first day's visit from start to finish. Needless to say, any anger the elder Veela felt for making such a quick departure was rapidly cooling off in the face of potential benefits.

"...and so when I come to the last door, the one which so very clearly contains the very answers we set out to find, I find that I cannot open it. As she is stuck one room behind me, Marion cannot assist, not that any magic will work here aside from our natural Veela inheritance." Fleur finished her narrative only a few paces from the first cut stone step at the base of the temple.

"You did not see the island or temple until the magical portal opened?" Apolline asked.

"That's right." Fleur replied. "And we could only approach it through the portal. Walk around the wall and you don't see it anymore."

"We believe the magic may be similar to the Fidelius Charm. We were already within the effects of the magical gate when Gabrielle brought you to our feet. That, or her angelic side may give her special privileges even here." Marion added.

"I think that we are lucky." Apolline continued. "We started inside the protective boundaries of this temple and I for one have no intention of leaving the wards except for a direct return home."

Security was as much on Marion's mind as anyone else's. "As long as we are willing to accept living without magic, we could move all of our equipment onto the island and abandon the village entry entirely... until it's time to say goodbye to the locals."

"And you don't need us for that." Régine added. "No matter how safe or important this is, I refuse to risk Gabrielle another day. If you didn't expect her to be both the only one who can open the door and the only one who can pass through, I would insist on taking her home immediately after the door is opened the very first time."

Fleur and Gabby's grand-mère kept looking between the shaded interior and the twelve meter high Veela guardian statues.

"I would love to see those two moving." Régine mentioned almost wistfully. Marion's camera dutifully recorded both guardians before sweeping over the front facade.

"I would fear for my life if they did." Segolene replied. "I am willing to take your family's secrets to the grave, Madame, but I would rather my grave be back in Marseille and empty for several decades to come."

They walked into the entry vestibule, revealing the decorative wall sculptures and gold adorned guardians to all. With Segolene's help, Marion began setting up lights to better record the details of this first

room. She also set aside other cameras and a few more lights for the Veela present to take into the next room with them... assuming Madame Mitterrand or Madame Delacour did not declare the most holy rooms to be off limits.

"Grand-mère. Would you please open the door?" Fleur gestured grandly to the closed stone door resting between the two guardians.

"Merci."

Régine smiled at her granddaughter's deference and removed her coat. With the ease of a Veela grand matron long used to tearing her political and social opponents apart verbally (literally too, but that was a long time ago and strictly a Veela matter) the change came to her as easily as breathing.

With a cry that began human and ended distinctly avian, She changed from swimsuit model hot to Notre Dame buttress scary. A second cry heralded the summoning of her Veela fire, a bright orange ball which swirled violently as Régine fought her instincts and held the flames in place. Once more, ancient magics built into the thick stone walls reacted, allowing the stone doorway to slide into its pocket and granting passage to the treasures beyond.

"Oooooooooooooohhh..." Gabby may have been the only one to say it, but she wasn't the only one to think it. The little girl felt a firm hand on her shoulder; Momma didn't want her running ahead.

After picking up a still camera and some other equipment, Apolline, Fleur and Gabrielle followed Régine into the next room. Soon, only Marion and Segolene remained in the entry vestibule.

"Well?" Marion's question caught the French teen off guard.

"Well, what?" She asked, not quite willing to look away from the open door and the muted sounds of movement and muted whispering.

Marion reoriented one of the electric lights to cover the leftmost edge of the vestibule wall.

"Are you going to help me or not? You can't follow them and I need someone to adjust lighting as I record different sections of the wall."

Segolene sighed once and turned to help Marion. On the bright side, it was a beautiful temple and the more she knew of Veela history, the closer she felt to Fleur. She had to suppress a snicker at the thought that those stuffy cardinals and clerics in Rome inadvertently helped a lesbian relationship grow stronger within the walls of Vatican City. And etched in stone on the walls around her, Fleur's roots were displayed for all to see.

On the other side of the open doorway and its armed guardian statues, the four Veela visitors stepped gingerly through hundreds if not thousands of years worth of offerings to their ancient religion. Fleur, who had already been in the room once before, stepped gingerly between golden chalices and bolts of silk to take photos. Behind her, Régine and Apolline stuck close to each other and pointed at different artifacts, whispering back and forth about individual items as they drifted to the back wall.

Faster and more energetic than her elders, little Gabby skipped to the other end of the room. There was a pair of feathery wings outlined in narrow shafts of light and she wanted a closer look at them.

"Can you move?" Gabby asked the statue when she finally got to it. "Fleur says your friends outside can."

The stone angel with her delicate swept back wings and open arms didn't twitch. Not even a little.

"You're no fun... but at least you're pretty!" Gabby smirked. Fleur was right when she said this statue looked like her.

Behind Gabby and her new stone sister, Fleur began snapping photographs of whatever caught her fancy.

"Please don't touch anything, Gabrielle dear!" Her mother called. She and Régine were slowly making their way closer to her and to the door, but were still several paces away. As few of the treasures on display were particularly tall, everyone could clearly see everyone else. "Every single piece in here is sacred... far more important than a family heirloom. Do you understand?"

"Yes, Momma. I promise not to touch anything." Gabby replied to her mother before addressing the statue once again. "You look like you're praying. Are you praying?"

The nine year old turned around, hoping to discover why the stone angel looked so reverent. She quickly saw the outline of a closed portal set in the chamber's back wall. Smiling at the angelic theme, Gabby crossed the floor until she was within reach of the portal's stone face. The wing and halo pattern was very intricate; the closer Gabby got, the more she realized that each feather was modeled to be as lifelike as possible. They were even painted to have a pattern of soft brownish-gray spots here and there. Gabby almost reached out to touch the feathers, but then she remembered her mother's admonition and pulled her hand back at the last moment.

Then she saw the halo. The soft white ring seemed faintly luminescent and impossibly deep. Gabby focused her attention on it. Thoughts began to pour into Gabrielle's young mind unbidden. She remembered being very little and holding her arms open to her Momma, wanting to be held. She remembered skinning her knee when she was four and watching Big Sissy Flower kiss the pain away.

"Little Angel?" Someone asked behind her but the words were just noise to her.

The halo etched into the wall was her focus and the world around her fell away. She remembered Harry Potter; wet, pained and drowning yet still looking back at her as if she was all that mattered in his world- for in the very last seconds of his life, she was.

"Gabrielle." She could hear her mother but she was no longer listening.

Dozens, then hundreds of images passed through her mind, each of them a scene of love from her past and each of them tugged at her heart. The carved stone halo seemed to come alive to the girl's eyes, a ring of white-gold fire flaring in time with her heart beat.

Behind her, three women had dropped what they were doing to rush to her aid. Fleur was about to reach her sister, only a half-step away, when a great wave of angelic thrall hit her. Her vision went white with feathered wings as Little Angel transformed.

"Gabby!" Fleur's protective instincts battled with an overwhelming desire to embrace her perfect little sister and worship the being of purity and love that magic itself proclaimed Gabrielle to be. Either way, she was going to get closer.

The teenaged Veela reached out to her sister once more only to have her hand caught. Shock partially overcame her entranced mind and Fleur looked to her wrist. A delicate looking hand of polished stone held the young Veela with the strength of a vise; looking past the hand, Fleur saw the angel statue had moved to protect Gabrielle. It was looking at Fleur, yet both Apolline and Régine were also blocked by the guardian angel's fully extended wings.

Stuck between the instinctive need to protect Gabby and the magical need to worship her, Fleur was unable to do anything more than watch... not that her mother or grandmother were any more capable of action. They had no desire to offend the magical guardian between themselves and Gabby and the thrall was affecting them as well.

A flash of light caused Fleur's eyes to jerk back to Gabby. In the few seconds she needed to look over the statue and her elders, the little angel had raised her wings and pooled her power between the two highest feathers once again. A small globe of blue-white light became a humming ring of power. Gabby now had a halo to match the door.

No sooner had Gabby's halo settled into place than the entire wall before the Delacour women flared to life with thousands of softly glowing scripts, pictographs and ideograms. Without warning, the entire wall rippled as though its face were made of water, though stone remained stone and the portal remained closed... or did it?

Still seemingly caught in a trance, the little angel from the French Riviera stepped up to and then through the wall.

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The dungeons in Hogwarts were a dark, dank and lonely place in general, not at all the kind of place that warm, outgoing people would tend to inhabit. Of course, not everyone desired the company of others nor did everyone feel festive during the holidays. Some

people, in fact, preferred the solitude even if it only lasted for a few months of the year.

Severus Snape was fully immersed in his activities when a soft light appeared behind him. Soon the air around him became chill providing a clue as to the origins of this unwanted light. Ever the professional, Snape continued mixing the special order potion in front of him without even the slightest disturbance as he built up a scathing verbal attack for his uninvited guest.

"Peeeeeves..." Severus growled. "Unless you want the Baron to come after you day and night for the rest of your miserable existence, I demand you quietly back away and honor the sanctity of my personal quarters!"

Snape's threat would have been sufficient to send the tricky poltergeist spinning away in retreat... if he had correctly identified the spirit. He didn't.

Without any sort of retort or introduction, ghostly white fingers slid through the professor's greasy hair. Before the Potions Master could even finish shuddering from the unexpected touch on his scalp, his head was roughly shoved straight into the cauldron of bubbling essences and extracts.

'One part Severus Snape' was, of course, not on the ingredient list of this unfinished elixir.

"Aaaaaa-ha-ha-ha!" It was the closest thing to maniacal laughter Harry had ever managed, and damn but it certainly felt good.

He didn't bother to stay around long enough to see what the potion would do to the greasy git, but he did take the half second necessary to swat at a counter full of potion vials. As he sailed through the wall, loud hisses and clouds of colored smoke began to fill the air.

"Potty!"

"Peevsky!" Harry shot back at the poltergeist in the hall.

"Is the slimy snake frothing mad?"

"It's either that," Harry replied, "or he's dissolving on the floor!"

Before either malicious spirit could get another word in, two loud bells tolled with a deep hum which seemed to echo from every crack and corner.

"What's that?" Harry asked Peeves as the two began to zip down the corridor.

Peeves' grin showed an unnatural number of teeth. "Fire alarm!"

"Bugger!" Harry hissed. "We'd best split up. You never saw me, right?"

"Just some student or other roaming about where they aught not be!" Peeves turned on Harry literally and figuratively. "HELP! HELP! Harry Potter's gone and set fire to the castle! HELP!"

"You-"

But Harry stopped just short of shouting out some half formed epithet and put some distance between himself and the Potions Master's personal quarters. Oh, well. He could blame it on Peeves or he could accept credit where credit is due... and plot the next Great Disturbance while hiding from all that may pursue him. And he still hadn't thanked Peeves for showing him how to enter the git's rooms.

As soon as Peeves was out of view, Harry changed course and slipped through the stone above rather than the halls he and Peeves had been using. Myrtle said she'd be in the toilets nearest the Astronomy tower later if he wanted to talk.

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By the time Little Angel was once again in control of her own body, she found herself standing small stone outcropping which overlooked a creek at the bottom of a forest glen. Old gnarled trees ringed her position at a distance of fifty meters or so, but only smaller shrubs grew close by and the sky above was clear. A bright full moon gave her light enough to see her surroundings and she could also see more stars than she ever realized existed. Why, she could clearly see the Milky Way!

Pretty! She trilled, not quite realizing that she was still an angel.

It is, isn't it? A warm melodious call answered her from across the creek.

Surprised by the response, Little Angel lost her transformation as well as the soft background hum she had come to expect from her halo. A cautious little Veela pulled out her wand and pointed it in the direction the other 'words' came from. There was a golden light approaching from above the opposite bank, though its source was still hidden behind a rocky outcrop.

"Who's there?"

Gabby held firm, not that she felt any danger but her training with Misses McGonagall was beginning to pay off in the realm of self defense.

A soft warbling sound, more of a giggle than anything else, echoed across the waters as Gabby's visitor stepped away from the bare stone to herself. The visitor was wearing robes and sandals she hasn't seen outside of classical paintings or marble statues. And there were wings. A pair of broad feathery wings framed the visitor as well as the bright gold halo which hovered above her head.

An angel.

Gabby immediately lowered her wand and brought up her open left hand. "Hi!"

Her visitor trilled louder- more of a laugh than a giggle- and stepped onto the stream.

Onto... not into.

Hello to you, young one! I welcome you with all of my heart! She called.

It has been... The angel stopped for a moment and looked up at the sky. The night sky was cloudless, the planets were easy to read... and a fair few spy satellites were could be seen zipping by in low

earth orbit if one knew where to look. It has been a VERY long time since we have received visitors here. Much has changed, has it not?

"I'm sorry?" Gabby offered.

In answer, the other angel dipped into a slow, graceful bow above the shallow waters. Apologies are not necessary, young one. We do not suffer in the absence of others.

Gabby thought she heard the slightest bit of birdsong in the forest around her, but it could have been just her.

Now they choose to be impatient? Very well... The angel called without moving from her watery perch. I am made in the image of Gabriel. I and my sisters have been waiting patiently for others like us to appear that we may give them comfort, advice and foreknowledge.

"Gabriel? Really?" Gabby perked up tremendously. "I think Momma named me after you! Are you really an archangel?"

Gabby quickly twisted around, scanning the land and forest around her. "Is this Heaven? Am I going to meet God? Is this my job interview?"

I think Babel's tower affects us even here... The angel twisted her head to the side slightly before straightening out again. May I come closer, young one?

Gabby nodded quickly and watched as Gabriel shed her angelic body and reverted to human form. She wore a gown of burgundy and earth tones, a leather belt about the waist and a simple golden torc around her neck. She was a woman of unearthly beauty, though no one feature stood apart from the rest. Her skin was fair and warm brown hair fell in ringlets down her back. Despite the not so bright night sky, Gabby could tell that Gabriel's deep chocolate eyes were filled with love... and with power.

Gabriel stepped up around the rock which was Gabby's perch and held one slim hand out to the young Veela. Gabby refused to flinch; rather, she leaned in to the older angel's... Veela's?... reach and allowed soft fingers to trace a path across her temple.

Gabby's eyes closed in appreciation of the contact; and in so doing she missed seeing tiny arcs of lightning dance across the older woman's irises. Gabriel retracted her hand and smiled.

"Greetings to you, Gabrielle, daughter of House Delacour and much loved Angel of House Potter. I am most pleased to see you here this day." Gabriel spoke in perfect modern French. "Perhaps you will bring 'your' Harry with you next time? I would very much like to meet him."

Gabby blushed hard, shifting from foot to foot and giggling like the little girl she was. Harry loved her! Well, of course Harry loved her- he says it himself all the time- but it's different when an angel says so, isn't it?

"To answer your questions, dear," Gabriel started, "We are not in Heaven, though I think it is a wonderful place. Think of this space as a dream built and controlled by powerful magics. I was made in the likeness of Gabriel, who you now call an archangel. I am not the real Gabriel, but a magical copy of her as she appeared in life complete with all of her memories... and my sisters also have the memories of their original selves."

Gabby looked quickly about, but she still couldn't see any more angels yet. There were a few soft lights moving in the forest around them, but she could not tell what kind of lights they were even if she did have her suspicions. Gabriel smiled at her young guest.

"As for meeting God, Little Angel, I'm afraid I cannot help you there. You may be in a chamber your mother considers the most sacred to Veela in the realm of the living, but no all-powerful Creator awaits in the forests around you. And as for a 'job interview'... That delightful boy you love 'hired' you as soon as he kissed you in Black Lake."

Gabby's face scrunched up in concentration. "Are... are you saying Harry is God?"

"Is Harry all seeing? Is he all knowing? Would you pray to Harry for rain in times of drought? Would you sacrifice a lamb in his name?"

"N-no..." Gabby deflated. She didn't really think he was, but for a second she had hoped so.

"Do you feel his presence even when he is not there? Does the mere thought of him give you strength? Do you believe that, should Harry wish it of you, you could turn night into day? Heal the afflicted? Punish the wicked?"

Gabby searched her heart as each question was asked of her. And when she searched her heart and her joy at the answer banished the night sky above them, turning night into day.

"Yes! - Waitamminute..." Why ask questions that don't all have the same answer? Why make Gabby doubt her answers? Waitamminute even more. If she limited her answers to her Harry dreams, wouldn't the answer be 'yes' to everything? Well, everything except the drought and lamb bits.

"You see? It is not so easy for me to answer your question. Harry is certainly not God if you judge him by the Bible, but what if you don't? Did you really come here thinking that all angels served just one Lord? You will come to find they did not.

"Long before your time... even long before my time... there were many powerful mortals and even a fair few immortals who were called gods by those that lived near them. Being magically gifted and long lived was enough to prove godhood in the eyes of any common farmer and Harry's ghostly abilities would surely have earned him a cult following among those who favored worshipping gods of death like Anubis or Mandos."

"But..." Gabby tried her hardest to pay attention. It was like hearing a school lecture mixed with a Bible story, except that it was about her and Harry. "What about you? Aren't you an archangel like the Bible says you are? Don't you serve God? Didn't the real you serve the real Him?"

Gabriel smiled and looked off into the distance.

"My Lord is an awesome Lord indeed. His love is great, as is his wrath, and I am but one of his faithful messengers."

Gabby wondered what kind of magical copy could blush. This Gabriel must have like liked her Lord like Gabby did Harry. Oh, Harry...

There were now two blushing, daydreaming highly magical beings standing in the middle of a sunny glen.

"Oh, sorry!" Gabriel collected herself, "But angels such as you and I are tied to our Lords by the heart; by the blood flowing through our veins and by the love we have for them. I spoke in His name, fought His enemies and delivered many foretellings which all came to pass in time."

For the first time, Gabby saw Gabriel lose her inner warmth.

"But my Lord's time in this realm is passed." The older angel... the copy of an older angel, anyway... she looked up into the sky and willed night to return along with all of its stars. "The stars, the great time piece floating in the Firmament... in them I foresaw my Lord's choice to step away from His long held post as a shepherd of mankind. He moved on and left a chosen few of His messengers to fulfill His will until mankind could have some hope of achieving it's true potential unaided. Michael, He did leave, and your friend Jeanne was one of her final tasks. I was left as well... the real Gabriel was left... but my service must have come to an end, for I know not my own fate! Surely the real Gabriel is not toiling in the fields for the few commands my Lord gave that I remember still..."

Gabby watched Gabriel track planets and stars through the night sky. "I never could consult the stars as to my own fate..."

"I- I could ask Harry..." Gabby offered uncertainly. "He helped Jeanne move on and he might be able to find out something about your real self. He's good at doing weird things and he's good at saving damsels in distress! I wish he were here... Poppa had him run an errand today and he wasn't home when Momma got Fleur's owl."

"Why don't we try to find him... see what he's doing, hmmm?" Gabriel offered.

"We can do that?" Gabby looked up excitedly. "I'd love to!"

"Certainly." Gabriel cooed. "I will need to do something... something I can teach you and your Lord to make use of when you bring him here."

Gabby hopped closer. She was so excited that she had risen onto the balls of her feet and was not likely to drop back down anytime soon.

The older woman approached and once more held her hand out to Gabby. Little Angel quickly leaned into her companion's reach, closing her eyes as soft fingertips traced a small outline on her forehead. Yes, there.

"Ahhhhh, there he is." Gabriel murmured into Gabby's ear. "Very clever, young Lord... and entertaining..."

She stepped back. "Open your eyes, Gabrielle, and behold."

Gabby did as she was told.

They were no longer in the glen by the creek any longer. The magical night sky was missing too. Gabby couldn't see the sun for all the clouds, but she could at least tell it was daytime. They were at the top of a high tower on a castle in a snowy forested area. There was a lake to one side... and the castle did seem a bit familiar. Gabby tried to remember which one it was.

Maybe if two teenagers weren't snogging each other, she may have been able to figure it out faster. Gabby tried to ignore those two, but they were much better at ignoring her.

"Harry's here? I don't see him."

"Soon, Gabrielle." Gabriel answered.

A trap door nearby creaked open. The teens didn't notice even if the angels in human form did.

"Mister Clark. Miss Hamilton. That is quite enough." Albus Dumbledore's voice emerged from the tower below. Two hormonal teens jumped apart as if zapped by lightning and quickly moved to opposite sides of the tower battlements.

Dumbledore chuckled.

Gabby tensed for a moment, but Gabriel set a hand on her shoulder to calm her. "They cannot see you, Little Angel, for while they are really here, we are not. We have not left the temple."

"You need not fear loss of House Points today, though I would like to see the both of you retire from this tower shortly."

The embarrassed teens both looked down and humbly agreed to their Headmaster's request.

"Have either of you seen two ghosts about? Two young ghosts?"

Slowly Miss Hamilton shook her head in the negative.

"Pity. If you do see them I urge you to report them to the first painting or staff member you come across. Will you do this for me?"

That question got two meek 'Yes, Headmaster' s out of the couple.

"Very well. Good day to the both of you." Albus quickly returned from whence he came.

For a minute both living teens and both angels held still, waiting for another to make the first move or noise. And then...

"Bloody brilliant! It worked!" Harry shouted as he slid out of the boy he had been possessing.

Mister Clark's eyes crossed and he fell to his arse. Across from Mister Clark and Harry, Miss Hamilton shed her own ghost before staggering to the side. She was forced to put a hand on the ramparts to stay upright.

"I'm quite glad you liked it!" Myrtle replied to Harry, a heavy spectral blush on her cheeks. "I certainly did."

"We... they're okay, aren't they?" Harry looked between the two living teens in front of him. "They look a bit out of it."

Mister Clark was already trying to get his bearings back though Miss Hamilton looked a little punch drunk.

"Sorry about that, mate." Harry called to the boy. "I kind of don't want to be found right now and... well... we needed a way to throw off the old man."

Mister Clark just nodded stupidly and smiled.

"Glad to be of service then!"

"Fifty years. Fifty years I've spent sulking in U-bends and only now do I learn how to do that." Myrtle sighed.

"I'm sorry Myrtle, but I really don't think I'll be doing that again. You're like a sister now and she (Harry inclined his head in the living witch's direction) only proved that I'm not interested in snogging girls I don't love." Harry said, absently wiping at his ghostly lips. "If I weren't already dead, Hermione might just have killed me for that."

"Oh, don't be that way Harry." Myrtle slid up to his side, offering a shoulder to cry through if he needed it.

"I know that was my first kiss ever and all," Harry flinched at Myrtle's pronouncement. He'd forgotten about that. She continued, "but I could tell you weren't giving it your best effort. If Hermione gives you any trouble, I'll set her straight for you."

"Just as soon as she comes back to Hogwarts. Right. I'm a dead-well, I guess I am a dead man, aren't I? Anyway, try not to abuse the power, Myrtle. Just because you can step into some random girl and snog her boyfriend's face off doesn't mean you should." Harry called. Myrtle began cackling like a madwoman. "Oh dear God, what have I done?"

As Harry shook his head, two unseen observers watched his train wreck of a life continue to spin out of control.

Gabby looked up at the older angel. "I want to do that. I want Harry to kiss me. Will he? When I'm bigger?"

Gabriel looked into Gabby's eyes for a moment before making a sweeping gesture with her hand. The tower, the students and the ghosts all disappeared to be replaced by the creek at the bottom of the glen.

Another sweep of her hand willed planets to move through the night sky above. Soon stars and other celestial bodies were accelerating on their paths. The full moon waned, became new and then waxed to it's original fullness. The cycle repeated. Mercury... Mars... Venus... faster they moved until they flew through the night sky as though birds racing each other from one compass point to the next.. Satellites of Earthly origin were little more than straight lines etched into the black expanse above.

Suddenly, they stopped. Gabriel looked back down to her young guest. Her grin was one of those grins that Segolene wore sometimes when leaving Fleur's room.

Gabby flushed deep red and began to titter. Soon, her heart met it's threshold of Harry thoughts and Gabby's change washed over her. Once again, an angel's lyrical laughter echoed down the glen. Only this time, it was an open call. Dozens of halo's began to shine out through the trees and gullies nearby. The forest began to glow in silver and gold and white and blue. Every angel ever recorded in the magical chamber now approached as they all wanted to meet the New Girl.

-o\0/o-

"That's the last role." Marion called to Fleur. "Please make sure you overlap the edges of your pictures so it's easier to piece them together again later."

Fleur had the decency to blush. The first three rolls of 35mm special low light film that Fleur took were used haphazardly to record whatever caught Fleur's fancy as she waited impatiently for Gabby to reveal herself.

Of course, it took half an hour before she, her mother and grandmother were willing to do anything other than stare intently at the stone angel and the wall Gabby walked through. Without magic and stuck in the middle of the one room on Earth that no Veela was willing to burn, their time was limited to fretting over Gabrielle's disappearance and doing something productive while fretting over Gabrielle's disappearance.

"Zank you." Fleur replied while she reloaded that particular camera for the last time before a resupply mission was undertaken.

As she loaded the last roll into the back of the Canon in her hands, she failed to notice Apolline and Régine stepping out behind her for a cigarette break. For a few seconds it was just her and the open camera and the riches of a forgotten civilization.

She didn't notice the small noise the angel statue made in moving back to its original position. She also didn't react to the first small pulse of light coming from the far wall. The next one, though, she couldn't fail to miss.

Fleur actually dropped the camera in a vain attempt to shield her eyes from the near solar flare blanketing the back wall. A now familiar hum filled the room before tapering off to near silence once again.

Hi, Fleur! Little Angel called. Can we go home now? I'm hungry.

"GABRIELLE!" Three women screeched in French at the same time.

"What?" Once again regaining white-blond hair and pouty pink lips due to surprise, Gabby froze.

Frozen in their own surprise, neither Fleur nor Apolline nor Régine managed to do anything more than look at Gabby from half a treasure room away. She certainly seemed unharmed, and if her energetic bounce from foot to foot was any indication, she was as happy as can be... or she had to pee.

"Gabriel said hi! She told me to tell everyone hi!" Gabby couldn't keep it in any longer. "And she's really pretty- and smart too! Did you know she could tell the future? She spent a lot of time foretelling things for people so I guess she should be pretty good at it – oh! - and she did it just by looking at the stars! I guess all that stuff about centaurs knowing the future could be true, yes? And they said Harry could come next time – next, and – but don't bring Pappa or any other man! Only Harry! 'Cause he's my Lord and I'm his angel and... and they said I should ask Daddy where Harry went today because Harry was being tested or something and in the next few days I'm going to be tested too! Only they didn't say what the test would be only that I'm a big girl and I have a good heart and they're sure I'll make Harry very proud... and they said... and Michael said that we might want to be angry at Poppa when we went home but we

shouldn't be too angry at him because he is a good man and Harry wanted to help Poppa..."

Gabby paused, seemingly thinking over her own words. None of the other Veela dared interrupt her due to the unusual report just gushing out of the nine year old's mouth in fits and bursts.

"Heyyyyyy... why are we going to be unhappy with Poppa?" Gabby mused out loud. "And why would Harry be part of it?"

There was silence for a moment as Gabby tried to work through her own clues. Régine finally managed to speak.

"Gabrielle, honey. Did... Michael... say why you are an angel and we are not?"

Gabby blushed and looked her feet. "I forgot to ask."

Apolline cupped her daughter's cheek in her palm. "It's alright, Little Angel. You can go back, right?"

Gabby nodded. "I'm supposed to bring Harry next time."

Thoughts of Harry and Poppa were temporarily set aside when Gabby put a hand on her stomach.

"I'm hungry. Can we go home now?"

Behind Apolline, Régine whispered to Fleur.

"Get packed up, quick as you can." She looked back to the door out and the two non-Veela witches nervously pacing just out of spear tip range. "Portkey straight home. No side trips. This exploration is postponed until the holidays are over and we find out what 'Michael' meant. Understand?"

"Yes, grandmother." Fleur looked out the door. "And what of Marion? We shouldn't just abandon her here during Christmas and leaving her here could be dangerous if the guardian statues decide they don't like her and we're not here to help."

Régine stared in the cursebreaker's direction.

"Please, grandmother. She took a secrecy vow before we made it as far as the lake. I owe her more than I can say. I trust her... even with this. Let me offer to host her until we are ready to return?"

"Very well. She seems trustworthy enough and your father's house does not lack accommodations."

After a tense half hour of planning and rushed packing, the group gathered once more on the frozen lake's surface and Apolline asked Gabby to transform.

Gabby lit up. "Okay! I know a new way to do it, too!"

"What do you mean, Little Angel?" Apolline asked her daughter.

The little Veela smiled brightly and answered, "Gabriel said that I might be sad and have a heavy heart one day and still I might need to change. There's a poem I can recite to make me happy again... it will 'release my heart' she said."

"I would love to hear this poem, my little angel. Will you tell it to us?" Régine loved attending Gabrielle's recitals AND this was a poem taught to her by other angels. She really wanted to hear this one.

Gabby nodded happily at her grand-mère and took two steps forward as though getting on stage. She then clasped her hands- her glove covered hands as it was very cold- together and placed them over her heart. Right before she spoke, she closed her eyes.

"My heart is yours, Lord.

Your blood in my veins."

Gabby wasn't so far gone that she would need help changing this time, but even so she still felt small shocks run up and down her spine as she spoke the words her new friends used back in the glen.

"My spirit is yours, Lord.

Your will guides my hand."

She felt light as a feather! Memories of Harry building her up from Inside and making her dreamscape their own personal Heaven bubbled to the surface.

"Through me you know eternal life;

Through you I know eternal love."

She loved him. She loved him so, so much; and she knew -just knew!- that he loved her every bit as much in return!

To the women around Gabrielle, the emotions running across the little Veela's face were so pure and tender that this would surely be a treasured memory for all. It was a prayer, pure and simple... and not just any prayer. Gabrielle's sister, Segolene, her mother and grandmother all knew that this was a prayer to Harry. Only Marion still thought it a lost prayer or magical incantation which had as it's focus some lost deity from a forgotten pantheon.

The only surprise to come from Gabby's quick transformation was that the women around her felt her angelic thrall several seconds before she changed, not after as had been the case previously.

A strangely silent Apolline came up to her angelic child and embraced her tightly. Moments later, Régine joined her daughter.

"Take us home, my Little Angel." Apolline whispered reverently. Whether or not Gabby's thrall was affecting her, she didn't care.

Gabby wanted to show her Momma another trick. When she opened her beaked mouth, she focused on her desire to be understood by all.

Yes, Momma.

Gabrielle's halo formed, expanded and fell in a now familiar pattern, and just seconds later Fleur, Segolene and Marion were alone standing on a frozen lake on the far edge of Eastern Europe. The girls and Marion would have to settle for arriving a day later, but then no-one wanted to risk having their backside carved off while trying to fit too many passengers in Gabrielle's personal transport-ring.

End Chapter

Chapter Seventeen: To Answer the Call

"Monsieur Delacour?"

Alain didn't look up from his stack of reports, but he did move a finger onto the Department Seal on his desk so that he could reply over the magical intercom.

"Yes, Guillimette?"

"Madame Delacour requires your presence at home immediately."

Alain's head came up for that, not that he could see his personal assistant from a room away, but he looked at the intercom-seal just the same.

"Immediately? Did she say why?"

"No, Monsieur. She did state firmly that this is not a request."

Alain slid further back into his chair.

"I'm leaving immediately." Alain said firmly. "Clear my schedule for the rest of the day."

"Thank you, Monsieur." Relief filled her words.

Alain made his way to the registered portkey departure point for his department, a walk of about three minutes as long as no one tried to stop him in the halls. His urgency must have shown in his face; not less than three other ministry workers went to hail him only to back off at the last moment. He entered the correct lobby, pulled out a medallion with his family crest on it and tapped it with his wand.

Under a minute later, Alain's portkey journey ended. He entered his home to discover Apolline waiting for him. She was clearly irritated, yet she gave no clues as to how bad it was. This was expected considering why he came home. His mother-in-law Régine was also there to greet him. This was unexpected.

On the plus side, he wasn't on fire yet.

"Poppa?" Gabrielle called out from a couch off to the side. "Did you ask Harry to go to Hogwarts today?"

On the minus side, he was going to be on fire soon.

"Yes, my Little Angel, I did." Alain walked over to his daughter's couch and sat down next to her. "He's been going to his old school every week to have a talk with his friends. Sometimes they talk about things I need to know to do my job, so Harry and I talk about it each time he comes back."

"Does Harry play hide-and-seek with Dumbledore every time he goes?"

Alain hesitated. Apolline's eyes narrowed.

"No he doesn't. Harry stays hidden so that Dumbledore doesn't know he's there." Where were these questions coming from?

Gabby looked into her father's eyes. She was worried. "When is Harry coming home, Poppa?"

"I don't know, Little Angel."

"Come, Gabrielle." Régine commanded. "We must prepare for your holiday guests. Help me add some more ornaments to the tree, will you?"

Alain's heart broke as he watched his youngest nod half-heartedly and follow her grandmother out of the room. Apolline immediately cast a silencing charm around the two of them. Gabrielle shouldn't be exposed to the kind of discussion her parents were about to have.

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"You asked for us, Sir?" Hermione called out as she and Luna stepped into the study in the Delacour guest house the Grangers now called home.

Alain set down a brandy snifter and answered. "Yes I did. Please girls, have a seat."

Luna skipped ahead of her new sister and dropped into one of the padded chairs in front of Alain's desk and began to run her hands over the leather upholstery. Hermione, having heard something off in the man's voice, entered the room alert. By the time she had taken her seat, all of her attention was on her host and not his furniture.

"I've done something... something which will end up hurting Little Angel in the coming days until I can discover how to fix it." Hermione sat straighter in her chair, the girl next to her didn't bother to react aside from digging a dirty fingernail into the leather armrest on her left. "In fact, what I've done may end up hurting most of my family, you ladies included, before all is said and done."

"I-" Hermione hesitated. It wasn't every day that Alain admitted to making a mistake, especially one that hurt Gabrielle. "If you don't mind my asking... what did you do?"

"What I've done, Hermione, is made a sacrifice for the good of France. At least, that's what I tell myself. To be more specific, I recruited Harry on behalf of my colleagues in Foreign Affairs."

Hermione's eyes darted back and forth as she reviewed her own memories for times when Harry wasn't with Gabby or herself; she looked for a pattern. "He's been crossing the Channel two or three times a week, most likely for several months, and spying on England for you?"

"Harry was right; you probably would have figured this out on your own much sooner were Beauxbatons not a boarding school. We needed someone who could get into Hogwarts. Harry knew several students in the castle who would talk to him in secret."

"It's the kind of thing Harry would do..." Hermione sighed. Of course Harry wouldn't allow Death itself to stop him from saving people.

"It was Harry that told us about Luna being taken from Hogsmeade. It was Harry that told me of the rumor that Luna was with her father in Azkaban. It was that rumor... which was presented with more credibility than it deserved, I admit... that pushed the I.C.W. into allowing a raid on the island prison. We owe the success of the Azkaban Raid entirely to Harry."

Hermione set aside her admiration for Harry and tried to connect Harry's spying activity with something that would hurt Gabby. Unfortunately, the answer jumped right out at her. She forgot to breathe for a moment.

"Please don't tell me that Harry is trapped in Hogwarts."

Hermione's eyes bored into Alain. His own gaze faltered for a moment before returning.

"He went to meet with his friends earlier this morning and he hasn't come back." Alain looked out the window beside his desk. Sunset was an hour ago. "He has never been away so long before."

"But Gabby needs him!" Hermione shot out of her chair only to fall bonelessly back into it a moment later. "I need him."

A soft hand covered Hermione's own as she strained to crush the hand rests of her chair.

"Don't worry, sister." Luna whispered dreamily into Hermione's ear. "Doctor Harry Potter Sir has a bit more Great Peril to work through before it's Maiden Saving Time again. Look to your heart and tell me you still doubt him."

Hermione worked through that odd bit of verbiage. The first sentence was entirely too Dobby-esque to be healthy for any growing girl to spout off. The second sentence was much more reasonable, as much of Hermione's adventures with Harry in the past came down to faith: faith that he would do the right thing and faith that he would prevail. Even in death, Harry seems to have beaten down his adversaries in spite of the handicap being dead really is.

The brown haired English witch absently moved one hand to inspect her hair before answering.

"Luna is right." She still had to swallow after saying that. "Harry will find his way clear of the castle... I'm sure of it."

"And if he can't, we have someone that stands a fair chance of making contact with him." Alain pulled out a small glass mirror, setting it aside for something... Hermione couldn't quite guess what.

"At least, she can as long as you don't mind you and your parents staying a little closer to my family for the time being. I need to pull someone out of your security detail."

Hermione and Luna both nodded. Faith in Harry Potter could carry them through a great deal of trouble... and it certainly helped that Alain had a backup plan.

As the two girls left Alain to his work, Hermione turned to Luna.

"You really think he's going to be okay? I mean, of course I believe in him, but that doesn't stop me from nearly falling to pieces every time this kind of thing happens. I'll never stop worrying over that boy."

Luna smiled patronizingly at Hermione. "Any snorkack could tell you so. Why, I'll have you know that Harry will soon be saving the smallest most innocent maiden he's gone after to date."

"How do you mean?" Hermione frowned in thought, as many would. "Snorkacks? The smallest one? What makes you say that?"

Luna held two fingers apart as a measure of distance. "I'd say she's about the size of a bean right now. What a delightful little pixie she'll be when we first meet her. She'll have her mum's eyes and hair, like there was any other possibility. And as for my knowing..."

Luna stopped for a moment to look into Hermione's eyes. "It's all right in front of you. You just don't see it like I do."

Just as quickly, the dirty blonde witch turned again and began to skip down the hall. Hermione hesitated for a moment, shook off the effects of one Miss Lovegood and then continued on.

Snorkacks. Honestly.

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"Nymphadora Tonks!" A man's voice called from a pile of clothes on the floor.

The ex-British auror in question dropped Mister Squeaky in surprise and turned to the pile of clothes on her bathroom floor.

"Nymphadora Tonks!" The voice called again.

Tonks scowled for a moment before a smirk removed the scowl. Her face shifted, then her hair and the rest of her body as her mind issued magical commands. She stood up, water and soap suds sheeting down her body for a moment before she gingerly stepped out of her bath and onto the tile floor.

A well manicured hand slipped into the pile of clothes and retrieved a small personal mirror which she looked into without returning to the bath.

"Alain Delacour." She tried to mumble out in a not too distinctive way before changing her pitch... "'alo. 'o eez eet?"

"Really, Miss Tonks..." Alain admonished from the other side of the magical mirror set. "Fleur's accent is much weaker than that and she would absolutely cremate you if she got word you tried to copy her while keeping your tan lines... and those breasts do not defy gravity enough."

"Uh, yeah, right..." Tonks gave up, peeved that her prank didn't measure up to the real thing. Starting to feel chill a bit of chill, Tonks slid back into the tub with her mirror in hand, reverting to her normal body and coloring at the same time.

"So, Mister Delacour, what can I do for you this evening then?"

"How kind of you to ask, my dear. I seem to have lost something in Scotland and my daughters are keen to get it back."

"We've less than a week to Christmas, sir. Maybe Saint Nick would be able to help more than little ol' me."

"You would be looking for Mister Potter on Hogwarts grounds. We have reason to believe that the Headmaster has altered the wards to keep him in."

Tonks closed her eyes and took a deep breath. "You want me to go save Harry Potter?"

"Unless the boy can get himself out of Dumbledore's trap, you may very well be the only one who can." Alain replied.

"Consider it done, sir." Tonks snapped her non-mirror carrying hand into a wet salute. "Special agent Double D Seven is on the job, sir."

"I'll alert your handler in Foreign Affairs. Good night, Nymphadora."

"That's Tonks to you!" But the metamorph could only see her own reflection now. "Prat."

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There was a pair of polished black shoes on the floor. Next to them lay an open bottle of wine on it's side with a small pool of red liquid staining the carpet beneath. A meter further across the plush carpet lay a white silk shirt and one of a pair of high end high heels. As with the other bits of clothing, there was no hint of the former wearer on the floor.

"I could really get used to parties like this one." Sirius said from atop the satin covered bed Nathalie led him to earlier in their evening.

He looked through the window to his right and watched the Mediterranean Sea pass by as lights from Barcelona glittered on the horizon. Music and revelry could still be heard through the thin walls of the luxury yacht's cabin.

"Get used to it then." A hand slid up his chest before scratching at the stubble on his chin. "This is how I do business. My girls will be earning a small fortune tonight."

"Thank Merlin that a dead sexy angel like you would even bother with a scraggly dog like me." Sirius responded by running his fingers through the light silver-blond hair fanning away from the Veela resting her head on his chest.

"I'm no angel..." Nathalie giggled. "...and I very much doubt Apolline will let her perfect little Gabrielle get into my side of the family business when she's old enough."

"She's too young for me by far, luv." Sirius mused. "I'm a dog, but not that kind of dog."

"I suppose I will have to get your house broken. Dopey is tiring of removing your scent from the ballroom colonnade."

Sirius smiled and pulled his lover closer. "You make it sound like you want to keep me around."

Nathalie turned her well manicured nails in a southerly direction.

"Perhaps... I think my Christmas present to you will be a sign of things to come." The French Veela quickly changed course and slid herself onto her wizard companion. One hand, she slid up his chest while the other fell down her own stomach to trace light circles below her navel. "Do you want to know what it is? It's something I'm quite sure no woman has ever given you before!"

Sirius liked it when Nathalie got excited. An excited Nathalie was an excited Sirius.

"Well... maybe a hint..." He added some puppy dog eyes just to make sure she wouldn't back out.

"I..." She actually seemed unsure of herself for a moment before a secret 'I know something you don't know' kind smile made the fugitive Lord melt. "I saw how much you enjoyed playing with Gabby and her little friends that one time... wearing those big hats and eating angel cake on the veranda."

"What?" Sirius panicked for a second. "It- it's not what you think-"

Nathalie bust out laughing, coating Sirius's face in spittle and easing his worries.

"I -snicker- don't think it is what you think I think it is, you silly mutt!" Nathalie rocked back and fourth on Sirius to get a better seat. He wasn't about to complain. "And that is all you are going to get until I have my present from you!"

It was Sirius's turn to be nervous. He glanced at the nightstand next to their bed and the tailored jacket draped over a bottle of champagne. The bubbly was a gift from Nathalie's main client of the evening; four of her girls were on the boat and on the clock.

Was he a Gryffindor or not?

Sirius grabbed the jacket and plucked a small box out of a pocket charmed to keep the contents hidden.

"I uh..." Sirius was close to shitting himself in fear. Death Eaters didn't get this reaction from him back when they tossed green magic his way in the old days. "I've been holding onto this for a little while now..."

Nathalie had a look he couldn't quite place. She was biting her lip, but not quite smiling. Her eyes were as wide and beautiful and sparkling as he'd ever seen her and she wasn't even smacking him around with her thrall.

"...well the Ministry... mine, that is; not yours... the Ministry doesn't seem to care what laws it breaks and I figure it's labeled me a criminal anyway... so I figure I don't need to follow it's rules about these kinds of things..."

Sirius held up the box for Nathalie to take, hoping she'd get to it before she saw his hands shaking. Almost too slow for him to bear, she took the box top between her fingers and opened it.

"Is... it this what I think it is, Sirius?" Nathalie was looking at a very respectably sized diamond ring. Respectable even by her standards.

"Look. You know I have my problems. Twelve years in a cold dark pit with nothing but dementors for company did me no favors. I owe my soul to my dead godson. Everything else... everything else I'd like to give to you if you'll take it." Sirius couldn't look her in the eye anymore. "I know you're more than I deserve, but I love you and I'll do anything you ask of me if you say 'yes'."

He didn't look up to see her reaction.

"You still have to ask me a question if you are serious about what you say."

Even as off kilter as he was, Sirius had to repress a chuckle. "I'm always Si- er... Will you marry me?"

Soft, perfect fingers brought the old dog's face up to a pair of crystal blue eyes. "Oui."

"Yes?" Sirius's voice caught in his throat. "Yes! You said yes! Bloody hell you agreed to it!"

Nathalie splayed open the fingers on her left hand so that Sirius could set the ring on her finger as custom required. The sapphire (to match her eyes) wrapped diamond slid out of its case, Sirius holding onto the ring with shaking hands as he tried to slip it onto the proper finger of his future wife. After what seemed like an eternity to Sirius, the ring finally made contact with Nathalie's skin.

Immediately, both Sirius and Nathalie felt the fateful hooking sensation right behind their navels which could only mean one thing. Someone turned his engagement ring into a portkey.

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"Now remember, my Little Angel. You are here with me tonight. I love you and I will do everything I can to keep you safe. Do not forget that." Apolline cooed to her little girl.

A soft nightlight provided a bit of illumination... as well as a light calming charm... to the dark room. Apolline and Gabrielle were in the master suite's bed; Alain would be spending his nights in an adjacent bedroom until Harry was back in Gabrielle's home and in her dreams. Momma wasn't letting go of her Little Angel until things were set to rights.

"Now... will you be okay with me tonight?" Apolline asked with all of the motherly love and support she could muster.

Sparkling moist blue eyes shined back at her. Harry wasn't there. Harry wouldn't be there.

Gabby shook her head and burrowed deeper into her mother.

-o\0/o-

Light approached.

Nathalie called to her instincts, to her blood, but there was no answer. All she could do was press herself tighter to her fiance's side and try desperately to ignore the fact that they were without clothes in a cold stone cell of some sort far, far away from the yacht they started the night.

"Good evening."

Two figures stood on the other side of a set of wall to wall bars separating Sirius and Nathalie from the rest of the world.

"I know... the accommodations are not quite up to your standards, are they?" The first figure called again. His voice was guttural and pained. His cloak didn't sit quite right either. "Neither of you will be able to change into your alternate selves under our host's wards so you might as well make yourselves comfortable."

"Have... have we met before?" Sirius asked. There was something there, but it was slipping out of his grasp.

"Some would say we were quite close, Sirius Black. True, they are lying, but they would say it just the same."

The first figure turned to the second and a change in lighting helped solve one riddle at least.

"Malfoy!" Sirius hissed at the second figure... the current English Minister for Magic.

Malfoy snarled and brought his wand up only to have it swatted aside by the first cloaked figure. Sirius paled at the implications.

"Be patient, Lucius." The figure turned, revealing more of his unnaturalness to the two imprisoned lovers. Two odd bulges pushed at the back of his cloak. "Let me savor their fear and confusion before we add the pleasant aroma of pain to the mix."

"Who are you? What is it you want?" Sirius railed again at the hell his life was returning to. He pulled Nathalie tighter to his side just in time to feel the first tremors of her panic attack.

The man, if indeed he was one, chuckled. "I'm actually a very simple man. I want everything. Absolutely everything. You two..." One

gnarled finger arched out in their direction, "...will help me on my way by being the main attraction in a big celebration Minister Malfoy here will be hosting in only a few days."

The cloaked figure turned and nodded to Lucius before walking off. The white-blond Pureblood turned back to his prisoners and called out haughtily, "I'll save your interrogation for the aurors who are even now on their way. But there is one question I'd like to ask you before they get to you. How does it feel knowing you are only days away from death at most?"

Sirius felt some of his Gryffindor pride push through for the second time this evening.

"It'll be nice to see James and Lily again." He even managed a bit of a roguish grin by the end of it. "I'm sure we'll be having a few pints together and cursing your name as you fail in whatever it is that you are planning."

"Crucio!" Malfoy roared, no dark master there to stop him.

Horrible realization struck Sirius just as the screaming began. He wasn't the one getting cursed.

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Breakfast began as a light and happy affair in the Delacour household. Fleur, Segolene and Marion arrived late last night and Cedric, Susan and her family would be arriving this evening, but the holiday already lost all of its celebratory feeling even if some recent arrivals had yet to discover it.

Three explorers were all eating breakfast together, the two teens giving Marion a brief recap of their family's struggles from spring onwards.

"You know," Marion paused, an éclair at her mouth. "I don't think I've ever heard of a human shaped patronus... not in Europe or the States or anywhere else for that matter."

Segolene nodded her head in confirmation. "That's our Little Angel for you. Of course, she could have cast a cat shit patronus and I still would have been thankful. With any luck, the attack on Azkaban got

rid of all those dementors, but I think I'll try to learn the counter to them soon anyway."

The brunette shuddered slightly in memory of her brush with the soul suckers after the Third Task. As she did so, Apolline approached the breakfast table, a very tired looking Gabby holding tight to her mother's robes.

"Gabrielle!" Fleur called happily... until she saw the miserable expression on her younger sister's face. "Little Angel, whatever is the matter?"

"You remember our message from Michael, Fleur? The one about Harry and tests?" Fleur nodded at her mother's question. Those who ignored the words of an Archangel did so at their own peril.

"Harry did not return to us last night." Fleur's eyebrows rose at her mother's pronouncement. "We believe that he was found out on a trip to Hogwarts Castle. The Headmaster most likely changed the wards to trap Harry on school grounds."

With that, Segolene and Fleur felt an added urgency in recounting their history to Marion. The rest of the talk wasn't far off from a fresh soldier's briefing upon joining their new unit. Twenty minutes later, a time in which Gabrielle stuck to her mother's side and didn't eat anything, Virginie announced the arrival of the Granger family. A minute later, two dentists and two teen witches came into the room.

Gabby immediately hopped away from her mother and ran to Hermione, wrapping the older girl in a tight hug.

"I'm sorry." Hermione apologized to the group. "Gabby had a dreadful night."

"Apologies aren't necessary dear... but... how did you know she had a dreadful night?" Apolline asked. A lot of people in the room wanted to know the answer to that one.

"Harry taught her how to enter my dreams, Momma." Gabrielle's voice called from the ball of angel hair pressed into Hermione's bosom. "She chased the mermen away. Harry banished them far away, but without him to protect me they came back."

That answer only made people more interested. As Gabby wasn't in the mood to say more, Hermione began to explain things.

"For me, this all started about a week after the Second Task, though I now know that it started that very night for Gabby here..."

It wasn't like they were intentionally keeping it a secret, not that they were actively spreading it around either. Actually, Luna knew. She mentioned it during the first Girls Who Have Been Personally Saved By Harry Potter meeting. Hermione tried not to dwell on that fact too often.

"... so then we come up to last night. As Gabby already mentioned, I had to save her from mermen to begin with. All the way at the bottom of Black Lake at that. She was bound to a large rock, too scared to even cry. Thank Jeanne I could breathe water in the dream, I'm not sure how well I would have done against the mermen had the laws of physics and nature actually applied."

Hermione stopped for a moment to drink some orange juice and reflect on the fact that she's willing to invoke Jeanne's name again.

"Once we were out of the water and dried off, I had to carry the poor girl to Hogsmeade where we could keep away from the aurors and Dumbledore. The aurors that were on fire, that is. It was when we went upstairs in that home in Hogsmeade that the dream really went pear shaped."

"What happened then?" Came the immediate question from Emma who was spellbound from the beginning of her daughter's story.

"I..." Hermione hesitated, looking down to the little Veela cuddling against her. Gabby didn't move and Hermione took her non-action as permission to continue. "We went up to the top of the stair looking for a room to rest in. I knew from before that Gabby can fall asleep inside of her own dreams, so I thought the best way to get her out of this nightmare was to put her to sleep again and stand guard over her for the rest of the night. We didn't count on a fight breaking out downstairs."

"At first, I couldn't tell who it was fighting, but then one of the men downstairs told 'Lily' to take 'Harry' and leave. Then I heard another man cast the killing curse and saw green light at the bottom of the

stair. That... that's when I figured out this part of the dream wasn't Gabby's. It... it was Harry's. I... I suppose this just proves how closely the two are bound together that Gabrielle can dream about what happened to Harry in real life."

It took a moment for Hermione to collect herself but no-one dared interrupt her now. A soft snuffle broke free from the ball of Veela on her lap and Hermione stroked the young girl's hair. Nightmares are ever so much worse when you know they're based in real life.

"I dreaded seeing what lay behind us in the nursery, but I couldn't not look. There stood Lily Potter, desperately holding onto a very little Harry and doing anything she could think of to make her son safe. It... it didn't... V- Voldemort offered to spare her life if only she'd give up her son... sh- she offered herself in Harry's place. That was the second time the killing curse was cast and... well..."

Hermione desperately fought back the tears pooling in both eyes. She wanted everyone to know how brave Lily Potter was even if it meant reliving the most horrible thing she'd ever witnessed up too and including her own near execution by dementors.

"Lily gave up her life for Harry. I don't know if there's a monument to her sacrifice, but there should be. By that time Gabby was curled as tight to me as she could get. I covered her ears for all the good it would do. After that deranged lunatic killed Lily, he laughed as though victory were assured and cast the killing curse one last time. He cast it at a little boy, not even two years old, who was only just starting to cry for his dead mother. That last wave of green light pushed me back into the waking world and I can only hope it did the same for Gabby."

It was only as the elder Grangers and Luna all came together to comfort the two emotionally battered girls that Apolline noticed someone on the other side of the breakfast table she hadn't expected to see so soon today. Alian was back from the office.

The man of the house passed his wife a silent request to speak with him in the next room. At her raised eyebrow, he repeated the action and pointed to a bundle of newsprint under his arm. Apolline nodded reluctantly before telling Fleur to look after her sister. At one end of the breakfast table, a brunette with tight curls noticed.

In the outer hall, Alain wasted no time and unrolled the paper in his hands. It was a copy of this morning's Daily Prophet.

"A gift from Tonks. She entered Diagon Alley early this morning as she was passing north on other business. On seeing the commotion outside of a book store, she immediately got a copy and sent it by Gringotts' special courier service." Alain murmured into his wife's ear as she read the day's headline with even more sorrow and anger than she had listening to Hermione's dream recounting.

The Daily Prophet

December 22nd, 1995

SIRIUS BLACK CAPTURED

Light wizards and witches of the world, rejoice! We at the Daily Prophet have just received exclusive news from our most noble Ministry of Magic that the Slaughter of Azkaban has been avenged! Infamous dark wizard Sirius Black and his French Veela mistress are in custody!

Late last night, an expert team of the very finest aurors our great English pureblood houses have ever produced conducted a daring raid on the notorious French island prison Chateau d'If in the Bay of Marseille. In a magical battle that shook the prison's very foundations, wave after wave of dark creatures and corrupted French wizards were cut down by righteous English magical fire.

"We started with stunners... gave them the chance to do things right, we did." Recalls the brave Auror Captain in charge, though he wishes to remain nameless due to his great humility. "It was only when they set werewolves on us and began tossing out unforgivables like sweets from a Honeydukes sale did we accept that deadly force would be necessary."

In light of this historic victory over the Dark, our beloved Minister for Magic, Lord Lucius Malfoy, has chosen to conduct a public trial in the center of Hogsmeade beginning at noon on the twenty fourth, only two days hence! "We, the proper upstanding magical subjects of England, must all come together to cleanse our country of the taint that dark wizardry has created. This foul criminal who claims an English Lordship and his... I dare not describe her accurately when

children may read the account later... these two must be dealt with before we as a people can celebrate Yule, the age old tradition of our ancestors to signify the end of one year and the beginning of another."

We at The Daily Prophet will be well represented at this historic event, as there are rumors from unnamed officials inside the Ministry implying that dear Minister Malfoy will push for a swift execution by burning at the stake in lieu of the dementor's kiss. Work on Azkaban with the intent of freeing our loyal allies from the rubble continues to be hampered by harsh weather.

For those of you who wish to witness this historic public trial, please remember to have the proper credentials ready for review. Only purebloods in good standing will be permitted to attend the function, and then only after they have performed a minor oath of patriotism and loyalty to the Ministry and its future initiatives. Half-bloods need not attend. Any muggleborns found near Hogsmeade during the festivities or on the day of the festivities will be taken into Ministry custody to determine the extent of their collusion with French or otherwise dark interests.

To see a list of muggleborn criminals and purebloods whose loyalties are in question who were taken to the new ministry internment camp in relation to the Sirius black investigation see page 3.

For more on Sirius Black see pages 5 through 9.

For more on dark Veela in history see page 13.

"We can't let the girls see this." Alain stated plainly.

Apolline looked stricken when she turned to her husband. Having Harry go missing when he might possibly return was bad enough. Learning Sirius and Nathalie were imprisoned and only hours away from a painful public execution was more than she could stand.

"The tests remember? The angels told Gabby there were to be tests."

A look of horror passed over the woman's face. Alain pulled his wife into an embrace to keep her from falling to the floor.

"I sent Tonks to Hogwarts to try to set Harry free. She's heading in the right direction already, maybe she can do something for Sirius and Nathalie... I don't know. If we are lucky, Harry will pass his test either under his own power or with Tonks' help. If we are very lucky, Gabby's test will be to stay here and believe in his ultimate success."

Apolline felt in the pit of her stomach that this would not be so, but she desperately wanted to agree with her husband. She nodded in approval. Alain would take the paper back to his office and Apolline would say nothing.

Perhaps their efforts to suppress the news would have succeeded if Segolene didn't have a listening charm on Apolline at the time.

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"Hello, Harry." A voice called out from behind.

"Hey, Myrtle." Harry turned to address his sister in arms. "What brings you down here?"

Myrtle looked past Harry to the bloody great snake carcass he'd been staring at for the last nine hours. The Chamber of Secrets was as quiet as a graveyard save for the occasional water drop falling free of the ceiling. It was quite dark too; illumination coming only from the insubstantial bodies of the two ghosts present.

"Doesn't move much, does he?" Myrtle replied prompting Harry to turn back to the snake.

"No..." A week or two ago, that would have set Harry laughing, but not today. "Nothing does much of anything down here and it's really tapered off in the last few years, or so Gwendolyn says."

"Gwendolyn?" Myrtle started looking around for another ghost. She'd never really come down here before, even after seeing a twelve year old boy jump into a slimy tube to save an eleven year old girl.

"I named the snake Gwendolyn." Harry said.

Myrtle looked between Harry and the dead snake a few times. "Why?"

"Because she doesn't look like a Margaret to me..." Harry turned and began to slowly drift up to the ceiling. "Hey, Myrtle... want to go mess with the mermen? I still haven't told them how disappointed I am with that whole 'killing me' thing yet."

"What's wrong, Harry?" Myrtle called.

Harry stopped.

"I may not pay much attention to those others... the living ones... but you're like me, Harry. I care about you. Please. You're not acting yourself."

Harry spun around.

"That's the thing isn't it, Myrtle luv. I do care about the living. I care a lot." Harry sighed. "Look, you can follow me or not... I don't care... but I've got some mermen to scare and a headmaster to rile up."

With that, Harry turned and shot through the chamber ceiling.

"Bu- I'm sorry, Harry! Wait!"

Just like that, Gwendolyn was left in peaceful solitude and darkness.

-o\0/o-

Cedric found himself in the middle of a garden. It was a bit chilly, but there was no snow on the ground and few clouds in the sky to keep the sun away as there would have been back home.

"Hmmm. Nice." Susan must have just come in behind him. "Is this the last stop or just another one of those checkpoints, you think?"

"No, Sue. I've been here before. This is the right place."

At that moment, Apolline entered the garden from a side door and greeted her guests.

"It's good to see you again, Cedric." The Veela matron called while pulling him into a hug and kissing his cheeks.

Susan looked a little lost at the immediate affection shown to Cedric. God, but that woman was beautiful.

"We got your message of course, Apolline." Susan almost choked behind him. This wasn't Fleur? This was her mother? "I felt horrible when we heard about Sirius and Nathalie. She seemed like such a fun loving girl and I could tell she and Sirius were perfect for each other."

Apolline nodded in appreciation.

"Oh! Madame Delacour, allow me to present Miss Susan Bones."

Cedric swept his hand Susan's way prompting the girl to dip into a light curtsy.

"I'm very please to meet you, Madame. I'm also very sorry to hear about Lord Black and Miss Fournier."

Apolline had to give the girl credit for knowing Nathalie's family name. It was probably Alain's doing, but it was a nice touch just the same...

"Thank you dear. Welcome to my home, and please don't think you have to be so formal. Call me Apolline or Auntie or Aunt Apolline if you must." She then walked up to the young witch and gave Susan the same welcome Cedric received. "I hear Alain is holding up your parents and aunt at the office?"

"Yes Ma'am." Apolline made a face. "Er... yes Auntie..." All smiles again. "Politics, I'm afraid. If your husband is anything like my aunt then we won't be seeing much of the two of them until this... situation... is cleared up."

"Clever girl." Apolline nodded. Susan might as well have been a seer. "I do hope your parents are freed up by dinner."

Apolline stepped back and looked over both teens. They weren't here for her, were they?

"Fleur and Segolene are engaging in archeological studies with a guest of ours from the United States on the upper terrace." She waved one hand to a wide stone stair leading up one of the garden's perimeter walls. "Hermione, Gabrielle and Luna are watching television downstairs."

Cedric was a boy in love, but he was also a Hufflepuff and a Hogw-a former Hogwarts student. "I'll just head downstairs then. Hermione can't be taking this well and I haven't seen Luna since she was snatched from us in Hogsmeade."

Apolline nodded her head in the direction of the correct door. Cedric stepped by.

"Susan?" Apolline's call stopped the girl short of following her fellow Hufflepuff. Cedric paused and turned as well. "Oh, don't worry, Cedric. I'd like a little chat with Susan, here."

Apolline stepped up next to the strawberry blonde. "Just girl talk, I assure you. We won't be more than a few minutes."

Cedric looked into Susan's eyes. The young witch swallowed once and nodded. "You go ahead Cedric. I'll be right down. Promise on my heart."

The young man nodded back, turned and disappeared behind stone walls. Finally Apolline had something other than tragedy to focus on. She might have preferred a little more time to get to know this girl in front of her, but time was short and Apolline's household was strained at best. Any distraction was worth pursuing.

"You love him."

It wasn't a question. Susan's eyes got bigger. She was suddenly willing to reconsider following Cedric out of Scotland and into France.

"My mother would say I don't really know what love is... too young and all that."

"She's not Veela then."

"No Ma'am." Susan said nervously.

Under the circumstances, Apolline was willing to make allowances for her slip. Rather than wait for a correction to 'Auntie', she smiled at Susan in a very comforting and disarming sort of way.

"Relax dear!" One slender manicured finger reached out and poked Susan on the shoulder. "You have nothing to fear."

Now Susan was just plain confused. Wasn't she intruding on a Veela's territory?

Apolline took Susans's hands in hers and looked the younger witch in her eyes. "We Veela are more open when it comes to matters of love and lust than most others. Fleur has not felt the need to settle down and make me a grand-mère... thank Jeanne for small favors... which means you are free to pursue Cedric if you wish to."

"I don't understand, Ma'-" Apolline glared. "Auntie! I don't understand Auntie." All smiles again.

"Ask Fleur to help you. Better yet... ask Segolene. She loves a good challenge and has more time to give. Your only serious opponent in this battle is Cedric himself."

Susan looked up in confusion.

"I promise on my heart that you need not fear my daughter. In fact..."

Susan watched Apolline look between the door into the house and the stair to the upper terrace.

"I have kept you too long already... Fleur and Segolene will speak to you soon once things have settled down some... anyway, let's get you reacquainted with your friends, yes? I'll take you to them."

Susan wasn't quite sure what just happened, but the non-scary parts did show promise. She remained quite thoughtful up until the point where she was once again in a room full of teenaged English witches... plus one wizard... and one adorable yet sad little girl.

"Luna!" Susan shouted across the room before leaving Apolline behind to wrap her friend in a hug.

Apolline quietly slipped out of the room before heading for the terrace, Fleur and Segolene. There was plotting to be done and it would be a good way to keep her mind off more immediate concerns.

-o\0/o-

They all congregated in Fleur's bedroom. White Christmas played in the background as they sat in a small circle. Being the only man in the room, Cedric stood by the window and watched clouds drift through the sky.

"Now?" Hermione asked.

Fleur nodded.

"Mother took Gabrielle for lunch and shopping, just the two of them."

Aurors went on the trip as well, but that was an accepted part of this family's lives by now.

Hermione turned to one of the other occupants of the room. "Segolene?"

The brunette moved to the radio and began turning a dial. She passed two other stations before catching a burst of static and some low whispering noises. There, she stopped adjusting the dial and pulled out her wand.

As the others watched, Segolene tapped the wireless set twice and mumbled something under her breath.

"...up to the podium. It's a cold, miserable day here in Hogsmeade village but you wouldn't have expected anything else this time of year, eh?"

"Right you are Stephen. The snow went past my knee when I first floo'd in this morning but our Ministry was there to provide, as always. Wizards from Magical Games and Sports were quick to ward off the cold."

"But not as quick as the Department of Magical Law Enforcement to sweep the town clean, were they?"

"No they weren't, Stephen."

"In fact, our very own Ministry's personnel went above and beyond the call of duty to secure the entire village. Muggleborns, half-bloods and those purebloods of a less trustworthy nature were moved out of the village wholesale. I'm told that the D.M.L.E. is taking the opportunity to give everyone in town a security screening. You never know who you can trust and who might be in league with the French."

"All too true, Stephen. I had a cousin who didn't even know he was dating a half-blood until she was confronted by Ministry officials while doing some light delivery work for a firm off Diagon Alley who shall remain nameless."

"We don't know for sure if even they knew she was a half-blood, do we?"

"That's right, we shouldn't go off slandering a store if they honestly didn't know her blood status. Long story short, the witch in question is out of a job and my cousin is available again."

"All's well that ends well, eh Richard?"

"Right. Say... I am feeling a bit chilly come to think of it. But in an hour or so and I'm sure the good wizards and witches of the D.M.L.E. will warm things up for me. I see two lovely stacks of wood in front of the stage, and each one is built up about a tall post."

"How lovely, will we be having a roast later this evening? Cooking up a goat for Yule a night early are we?"

"I wouldn't think goat, Stephen, but a beast of some sort; I'm thinking bird myself..."

Hermione wanted to turn away from the radio- to shut it off, but she couldn't. She owed it to Sirius and Nathalie to follow the proceedings. She needed to see what flawed and tortured logic the Ministry was going to use to send two good people to their deaths. She also hoped and prayed that either Tonks or Harry- or even the I.C.W. would find some way to get into the thick of it and deliver a Christmas miracle.

There would be no assistance from the I.C.W. today, due in no small part to the village's remote and inaccessible location. The entire valley was unplottable. Harry was still stuck behind the school wards. There was one person who was free to act assuming that one person could prevail against a secured gathering of at least one thousand wizards and witches.

-o\0/o-

-snap-

"What was that?"

Pansy Parkinson moved away from the boy she had been snogging to look around the woods.

"I didn't hear anything." The boy replied, trying to pull her back into his arms. "The Forbidden Forest is mostly east of here... this bit is the Not-So-Forbidden Forest."

"No, I really-" Pansy fell to the forest floor, out cold.

"What the-" Was all the boy could manage before red light sent him into dreamland like the girl before him.

"Obliviate." A perfect clone of Pansy, save the outfit, muttered. Can't have the boy waking up remembering a red light coming for him, now can we?

The copy then began transfiguring her own clothes to look like those of her first victim. She also took the parchments Pansy was carrying just in case the guards were serious about documentation. With little more than a swish and flick, the young witch and her paramour were both levitated into a more compromising position. The final touch was a light compulsion to get frisky as soon as either of them came too. Maybe they'll think they were overwhelmed with passion earlier or some such nonsense.

With two down and over a thousand more to go, Pansy Tonks-Parkinson set off through the Not-So-Forbidden Forest in search of Hogsmeade. It wouldn't be hard to find if she just followed the noise of the crowd. Thirty whole meters later, her balance failed her while

crossing a ice slicked log and sent her ass over kettle to the forest floor.

If a witch curses in the middle of a forest and no-one else is around to hear her, does she make a sound?

-o\0/o-

"Ah, Harry." Albus walked up to the ghost overlooking Hogsmeade valley from a tower window high above the west wing of Hogwarts Castle. "I was beginning to wonder if you'd ever slow down."

The man seemed in a good mood considering the grand chase Harry's been leading on and off for the last several days. Far more troubling in Harry's opinion was the lack of any sadness or regret in the old man's voice. Couldn't he hear the wireless broadcast from the next room over? Didn't he know that Sirius Black, Dogfather Extraordinaire, was about to burn to death and that the lovely lively Nathalie was to share his fate?

"You have much to answer for, young man." Ah, that's better. "Your rather cowardly attack on Professor Snape was perhaps the most dishonorable act I've seen from a Gryffindor in my full time as Headmaster of this school."

Harry didn't even deign to snort. "The git deserved it. I dare you to find even one living soul other than yourself that thinks he didn't honestly have it coming. Oh, and does the name Peter Pettigrew mean anything to you? Hmmm?"

"The fact remains that you nearly killed a man in your recklessness, you destroyed school property and set the school itself alight. Severus will have to rest several more weeks before he can set foot outside Poppy's domain again."

Albus was watching the young ghost carefully, wand secretly in hand as it has been since Harry was trapped. Harry continued to look out over the valley, to the village whose highest towers were only just visible from his window.

"Harry. Your independent streak has cost us both dearly-" But Harry did turn at that.

"Don't put the weight of these troubled times on my shoulders! Did I attack Bern? Did I kidnap a small child from France and try to execute her? Did I send Luna Lovegood to Azkaban! No! I bloody well didn't, did I?"

"You left England at a most delicate and inopportune time. You have no idea how many plans have been undone and how much work was made waste by your actions. I could have kept you safe here. Gabrielle and Sirius too. I have more influence and greater resources than you know. Sirius and his lady friend need not have come to their fate in Hogsmeade if only you had stayed here where you belong."

Harry turned back to the window.

"Where was your influence when Hermione came face to face with a troll at twelve? Or when Ginny came to be possessed by a Dark Lord at eleven? What resources did you plan on drawing from when that damned merman ran Gabby through? Are you calling me one of your resources- because if you are... if you are then that would explain a lot wouldn't it?"

"Now Harry-"

"And my parents?" Harry asked this one as if confirming a suspicion.

"You were born with a destiny both of greatness and tragedy."

"I'm with 'Mione on that one. Divination is utter rubbish."

Albus almost forgot Harry was dead. He started to put a hand on the boy's shoulder only to pull back at the last moment.

"Divination has its place as you well know. Do not forget the lessons of your Third Year. She has now given at least two true prophecies... one has come to pass and the other has yet to be fully realized."

"Yes, yes... Pettigrew got away. A lot of good your influence and resources did then, yeah?"

Albus shook his head slowly. Harry was being a very difficult pupil, but the Headmaster has seen many of those in his time.

"Harry. The prophecy came to pass. There was nothing any of us could have done to keep Pettigrew from fleeing to his master."

"So Trelawney got one right. Do you know how often she predicted my death in class? Easier to ignore her everyday so as to only be surprised once a decade or so. Pettigrew got away; that was her good one, right? What's the other one say then?"

"Have you forgotten the rest of the prophecy Sybill made right in front of you, Harry? Allow me to recite the latter part of it for you..." Albus took in a breath before continuing. "...the servant will break free and set out to rejoin his master. The Dark Lord will rise again with his servant's aid, greater and more terrible than ever he was..."

"But- but you said this one is the one already fulfilled." Harry was looking at his old headmaster with concern now.

"That's right. I did." Albus stood straighter. Certainly this would help turn Harry around.

"When." Harry made the word more of a demand than a question.

"The night of the Third Task."

Harry began to shake his head. "That can't be right..."

"I assure you, it is. Severus was able to confirm Voldemort's resurrection that very night."

"And you didn't say anything? You just let Malfoy become Minister without running against him? You damn well know the bastard's a Death Eater and- and... that's why Magical Britain is such a bigoted hellhole isn't it? Why Madam Bones and Arthur got kicked out and why all the muggleborns were getting rounded up on crap charges, right?"

Albus had been waiting for a chance to say this one. "I let Malfoy become Minister? I wasn't the one that banished a courtroom's full allotment of woodwork into Minister Fudge's chest, was I? That was your 'Little Angel' that did that."

"Self. Defense." Harry was seething now. His words came out barely above a whisper. "Fawkes appeared after Gabby banished the

furniture. You could have prevented that disaster by sending Fawkes earlier than you did. Why, Fawkes could have gone down to Ginny before I even found the Chamber of Secrets and flamed her straight to your office. If a mere Second Year could break the diary's spell then I'm sure the all knowing all powerful Albus Dumbledore could have done it in half the time it took me, right? Where is the little firebird now when a quick flap of his wings could take Sirius and Nathalie away from their doom?"

"Fawkes is too well known, Harry. If he flashes into the middle of a crowd of thousands, everyone will know who sent him."

"So? You don't feel like two lives are worth your job?"

"My presence here is the only thing that keeps the muggleborn students safe."

"Wouldn't they be better off in France? Australia? America?" Harry turned back to the window. The radio behind them seemed to be relaying closing arguments from the prosecution. Umbridge, the bitch, was the Ministry's chief accuser. "The I.C.W. cleared out Azkaban and they only had to kill one guard to do it. Set me free and I'll have an international force here in no time to evacuate the children."

"The I.C.W. doesn't work that fast Harry, I should know."

"I work that fast." Harry's response was automatic. He wanted out of this castle in the worst way. Judgment was coming.

"Do you really think yourself one of those muggle comic book heroes, Harry? Destiny does call to you, but you have yet to properly understand forgiveness and self sacrifice."

"Me? A hero?" Harry snorted. "I'll admit to having a 'saving people' thing but I've really come to see myself as more of a messenger."

Harry actually smiled at that. Jeanne may be absent from his day to day existence but the passionate girl would forever be part of him. Albus saw the ghost's whole demeanor change. He wanted to know why.

"And what, pray tell, is the message?"

Harry looked further left through the window to a more southerly direction.

Over sixteen hundred kilometers away, in a small bistro with a view of the Mediterranean Sea, a young girl looked up from her salad. She pushed her silver-blond hair aside and looked to the back wall, the one on the building's north face. She idly ran her hand over a long slender lump in front of her chest before realizing it wasn't the wand she wanted, only a replacement wand until hers was returned. The smile left as quickly as it came and she returned to picking at her salad.

Back in Scotland, Harry answered his former Headmaster's question.

"Sacrificing your own life for another may be a virtue but sacrificing others when they don't know they're being sacrificed is a grave sin. These people are not your pawns." Harry seemed to settle down a bit. "Sooner or later you will see this. Sooner rather than later if I have any say in the matter."

As Harry became quiet and returned to staring out beyond Hogwarts Castle and its wards, Albus chose to take a break as well. He turned to the window and its view of distant Hogsmeade as he focused more on the radio broadcast that had constantly been running behind their argument.

"...hem, hem... Thank you, Minister Malfoy... Lords and Ladies of the Wizengamot and of Magical Britain." Dolores Umbridge spoke. Her voice was heard directly by thousands and indirectly by tens of thousands more. "It is with a great sense of moral rightness and personal satisfaction that I give you the Wizengamot's decision. By unanimous vote, both defendants have been found guilty on all counts!"

There was a dull roar in the background as Stephen and Richard from the WWN service commented on the historic vote and the now certain fate of two bound and chained people. The English Lord and the French Veela were even now being levitated against heavy wooden posts with thick stacks of logs and tender beneath.

-o\0/o-

Draco Malfoy looked at his mother. Her face was quite pale, her normal regal beauty giving in to the mask of ill health.

"Mother. What troubles you? Are you well?" He took her hand in his, ignoring for a moment the presentation of evidence that his father was avidly watching.

"I... no, my son. I am not." She took out a silk handkerchief and covered her face with it for a moment before setting it down again. "Perhaps the weather does not agree with me."

Draco considered his options for a moment before seeking his father's attention.

"Yes Draco?" Lucius said in what most would consider a pleasing tone, but Draco could see the annoyance and distraction.

"Mother is not well, Father. I should like to take her away from the crowds."

"Oh?" Lucius studied his wife for a moment. "You are such a fine son to look after your mother so. I cannot leave these proceedings, else I would go with you. Yes, yes. Please see to your mother."

Draco nodded to his father and the two began to rise.

"Just a moment Draco..." A soft voice called from his side. Daphne. "I believe I may be suffering from what ails your mother. Would you escort me as well?"

From behind the fifteen year old witch, a shorter girl popped into view. "Me too. I'm sick and I'd love to get out of here."

Draco had to stifle a laugh at Astoria's lack of tact but agreed just the same. After a few polite farewells, the group of four slowly made their way along the trail to Hogwarts. In truth, he was glad leave the grotesque circus this trial was fast becoming. He knew the accuracy, or rather inaccuracy of the 'evidence'. It's not that he was feeling pity for Black or that Veela bird, far from it, but he could feel the Dark Lord's hands in this, and it rankled him. In his mother's delicate sensibilities, he had a clear excuse to be free of Voldemort's plotting even if only for a little while.

He walked close to his mother, yet it was Astoria's arm that somehow snaked into his when he wasn't looking. A discrete glance at the elder Greengrass girl revealed an impenetrable mask. He looked to his mother. When she returned his gaze, he saw her survey the two girls before allowing a soft smile to grace her lips. Draco knew that smile. It was the 'future grandchildren' smile. It was mildly annoying but proved his mother was pleased with the direction his life was going.

Yes, leaving the trial behind them was definitely the right thing to do.

-o\0/o-

With a pout here and an elbow there, 'Pansy' succeeded in making her way to the front of the crowd. If she were to be honest with herself, it took all of her loyalty and bravery together to make it that far. She passed small groups of witches and a family or two heading the other way. These were the ones who came for the trial but couldn't stomach what would be coming next. These groups also had small children who didn't need to see such adult things.

If anyone in Hogsmeade disagreed with the verdict, they certainly didn't show it. There were too many 'security officers' trolling the crowds looking for anyone who wasn't 'of the right sort'. Tonks acted the part of a proper pureblood princess and kept her papers ready... just in case.

Finally she reached the head of the crowd. Looking upon a stoic Sirius and panicked, teary eyed Nathalie, Tonks struggled to keep from throwing up.

"...found guilty on all counts!"

Her face paled at the pronouncement. What could she do? There were so many guards and so many witnesses... but then she had to do something! They were moving her cousin and his bird to the stakes! God dammit, what could she do?

"Sirius Black!" Minister Malfoy called. "You have been tried and found guilty of crimes against the Ministry and against the good people of Magical Britain. Had your underlings not been so fowl as to attack Azkaban without warning or reason, we would now have handed you over to the dementors. Sadly, they have been buried

under a mountain of rubble. We'll have you go first, I think. As you abandoned so many in life, it is only fitting that you abandon this woman in death. She will die alone. May your ancestors have mercy on your soul."

Lucius almost waved to the aurors present, but held off at the last minute. He dropped the Sonorus that had been projecting his voice and stepped closer to the old Marauder.

"I almost forgot. By this conviction and your execution, all of your holdings and the title of Lord Black pass immediately to my son. You have failed in every conceivable way, Black. I win."

Sirius was tied to a post and magically silenced, but he had to have the last laugh. After carefully judging distance and wind, Sirius lobbed a thick bloody ball of spittle onto Lord Malfoy's chest and grinned in victory.

Lucius was, of course, horribly angered by the public display. He immediately drew his wand, no longer content to watch as others killed Sirius for him. He was going to do it himself. As the Reductor curse flew free of Malfoy's wand, the entire crowd froze to watch the quick death sure to come.

Only Sirius didn't die. Gasps flew through the crowd as they watched a log from Sirius's own pyre fly free and intercept the deadly magical beam. The log shattered into hundreds of splinters causing both Sirius and Malfoy to flinch back. Everyone turned to the source of the magic that saved Sirius from the attack.

There. At the front of the crowd. Her.

'Pansy' was shaking and crying and holding her wand out. Clearly she had cast the spell to save Sirius's life. Almost too quick to see, several sets of hands grabbed her, one of them taking the wand from her hand.

Lucius stalked up to the girl.

"I... I couldn't let you -hic- do it." She sobbed. "It's wrong! All of it! -hic- Plain wrong!"

Lucius took a moment to collect himself before smiling at the girl. "I should thank you Miss Parkinson... if that is who you really are... I was going to end the show too quickly in my anger."

She only sobbed louder as orders were given to bring her forward and bind her only a few meters short of the pyre she summoned a log from. Tonks's cover was blown but it didn't matter any longer. She failed to save the day. She failed, and it felt more horrible than any hex or curse she ever took in the line of duty.

Lucius nodded to the aurors.

"Incendio!" Five red balls of flame shot out and set the wood under Sirius aflame. Nathalie fought tooth and nail against the magic binding her Veela nature and her voice. She saw death coming for the man she could silently admit to loving even if she never could say the words.

In a room in a magically fortified house near the base of the French Alps, a know-it-all bookworm wailed at the injustice of it all as her friends tried to comfort her while shedding their own tears.

-o\0/o-

A column of black smoke rose lazily up from the village of Hogsmeade. A flash of light and flame shot up near the smoke, hinting that Nathalie was about to follow Sirius on his way to the afterlife.

"How many more have to die before you learn your lesson, Harry?" Albus tried again to get the ghost in the window to acknowledge him. They both heard everything over the WWN.

It would seem that Minister Malfoy was now satisfied enough with the inevitable outcome that he had the silencing charms on Sirius and Nathalie removed. The wizarding wireless broadcast was now a mix of hushed commentary, the steady roar of the crowd and the shrieks of a woman who was now beginning to feel the heat of her own fiery end.

"No answer, young man? Very well." Albus seemed ready to leave Harry to his thoughts. "We can speak of this tomorrow or the day after. Perhaps some time alone will do you good."

"Just one problem, Dumbledore." Harry slowly turned from the smokey column to look at the Headmaster.

"And that is?"

"You won't be in France tomorrow, will you?" And with that, Harry Potter blinked out of existence before the Headmaster's very eyes.

-o\0/o-

A boy and his dog walked into a bar.

The boy snapped his fingers and pointed at a stool. "Up, Padfoot."

Padfoot the dog obediently hopped onto the stool and barked once.

"Stayyyyyyyyy." The boy said.

As the shaggy slobber machine sat patiently, the boy walked around to the other side of the counter and grabbed a pair of shot glasses from the sink.

"What'll you have, boy?"

Three quick barks followed his question.

"Sorry, I don't know any mixed drinks..." He looked back to the wall display and picked up a random bottle whose only distinguishing mark as far as the boy was concerned was the word 'Scotch'. "Will this do?"

Padfoot replied with a single laughing bark.

"One for you..." A shot of amber liquid left it's glass prison followed shortly by a second. "And one for me."

A large wet nose dipped in to sniff the shot in front of it. Satisfied with the scent, Padfoot launched his tongue into the alcohol. After only two good laps of liquid heat, the dog knocked his glass over. Not seeing this a a problem, he continued lapping up the liquor from the wooden counter.

Happy with the dog's performance, the boy knocked back his head and took his own drink in one swallow. That one swallow was immediately spat back into the air as a fine mist.

"Bloody hell!" He shouted amidst the coughs.

"Heeeee-he-he-he-hee!" Sirius Black fell off his stool he was laughing so hard. "The look on your face, Harry... priceless!"

"Nice to see you too, Sirius..." Harry recovered and poured two more shots. He also grabbed a near by soda can. Some of the older boys talked about 'chasers' in the Gryffindor common room sometimes and he thought one might help.

"Oh -he, he- Harry..." The scruffy dogfather tried to pull himself together. "Just in case you were wondering, burning to death is not fun."

The mood sobered. Both man and boy took a shot each to try to combat the effect.

"I'll take your word for it that it hurts more than a spear to the chest." Probably did by a wide margin at that.

A third round was poured. Sirius took his glass in hand, but stopped short of drinking. He looked around. "Nathalie isn't here. Why isn't she here, Harry?"

"Just a tick."

Harry looked around for a moment before spying a remote control. He took it and turned to where a large black television was hanging from the bar's inner corner. Click.

The image on screen was of Hogsmeade... just as Sirius left it forever to be exact... and it was paused.

"Dammit Harry! We've got to do something! Send me back!"

"I can't do that, Padfoot. That's not in the cards for you anymore." Harry looked at the irate man with a level of calmness that was entirely unexpected.

"Then why don't you do something! Anything!" Sirius raged.

"I will. Promise." Harry pointed at the screen. "See that, Padfoot? Paused. As in 'not moving'. I intend to do something about that."

Sirius battled with his emotions enough to see the look in Harry's eye.

"You're going to Hogsmeade?"

"That's right."

Sirius drank the shot in his hands, poured himself another one and drank that one too. "Give 'em hell for me, then."

"I intend to... as soon as Nathalie is taken care of."

Sirius put his arms on the counter and buried his head in his hands. "I just asked her to marry me, you know. The very night we got taken."

"Congratulations, Padfoot. You finally found happiness even if only for a little while." Harry put his hand on Sirius's shoulder.

"And look what good it did me... she should have stayed away... I failed a loved one once again."

"Don't think like that." Harry said firmly. "You've been shit on by fate all your life... not your fault."

Sirius didn't respond, so Harry changed gears. "I'd love to stay and chat, but I've got things to do and people to see."

Sirius nodded before pulling himself off his bar stool and wrapping his godson in a tight hug. Eventually, they parted.

"Anyways," Harry continued, "The remote is easy to use. Just hit play or rewind or whatever. You'll find a pretty long story up there with no commercial breaks. And drink whatever you want. Whole bar is free as long as you're here. If you ever do feel like moving on just go out the front doors. That's all there is to it."

"And what'll I find when I leave, Harry?" Sirius was concerned, Harry saw it in his eyes.

"Nothing bad I'm sure. Other than that... I couldn't tell you." Harry walked back around the bar. "Oh! Nathalie never did tell you what she got you for Christmas, did she?"

"Not that it matters now, but no she didn't."

"She really does love you, you know..." Harry paused before opening the door. "Congratulations you bastard. It's a girl."

As Harry left the bar, Sirius Black was stuck looking between Harry's back and the paused telly. Curiosity and sheer wonder eventually one out.

-o\0/o-

The ghost of Harry Potter appeared over a large crowd of wizards and witches. None looked high enough to see him for their interest was on the gruesome spectacle that was unraveling before them for a second time today. He watched as they mocked and jeered the woman who was now knee deep in flames and shrieking from the pain. The flames rose an inch or two higher as an auror cast Incendio into the woodpile again. Then Harry saw the other prisoner, the young witch bound and gagged before the pyres. No doubt she was near enough to get first or second degree burns.

"Tonks..." He murmured.

He turned his head to the sky and turned his concentration inward. With breathless lungs, he yelled, "GABRIELLE!"

In that small bistro over sixteen hundred kilometers away, the youngest Delacour girl suddenly jerked upright in her seat.

"I gotta go!" She shouted at her mother before bolting from her chair and sprinting for the lady's room.

A few other patrons laughed at the transparency of the little girl. More than one eyed their food suspiciously. Apolline sent one of her auror guards off to follow Little Angel just in case.

Ten seconds later, Apolline was shocked out of her chair when a wave of pure love and devotion swept through the dining room. Almost immediately afterwards, the hum of a bell being struck filled the air. It was her turn to run to the toilet.

By the time the Veela mother beat through the door and looked around, all she saw was the faintest afterglow of a ring near the floor... and a freaked out auror.

"What happened?" Apolline yelled at the soon to be ex-auror.

"She ran in, knelt down to pray, ch-changed and left Madame." The man forced out. "She- she really had to go!"

-o\0/o-

The flames were up to Nathalie's hips when it happened. A blue-white light appeared in the air next to Tonks. People began to notice. It expanded into a ring and began to drop to the ground, generating a loud bell like ringing in the air. Soon only people on the opposite side of the pyre were not looking at the light and even they were wondering at everyone else's distraction.

As soon as he saw his Angel, Harry blurred forward and went inside. At their reunion, a wave of love and peace rolled across the village so powerful that the full crowd was awed. Gabby's extreme joy at the reunion only lasted as long as it took for her to finish her transport and look up at the burning Veela before her.

NOOOOOOOOOO

As quickly as the massive aura of peace came, it vanished. Only Harry's presence inside prevented Gabby from reverting to human form and falling to the ground in horror.

Back in France, Hermione stared at the wireless wide eyed. She knew that screech. The voice was familiar. She wasn't the only one who thought so either.

"Nooo! Gabby, don't do it! Go back to Momma!" Fleur wailed at the speakers to no avail.

The crowd around Gabby was also staring wide eyed as not one of them had ever seen an angel... more than a few who's families never bothered with muggle holy books and had not the least clue what she was.

Lucius was shocked into inaction just as the rest of the crowd was. His master expected the proceedings to be interrupted, but then that girl blocked his curse and he thought that was the end of it. Much as Lord Voldemort claimed otherwise, Lucius simply didn't believe a little French girl and a ghost could be worthy adversaries no matter who the girl's father was.

In that split second after Gabby saw Nathalie and yelled, her silver chained wand was in her hands and flying through the air in a quick sweep. She's done something like it before. Burning wood flew away from Nathalie's pyre in a broad arc. Gabby swept both stakes clean of their fuel with enough force to snuff out the fire under Nathalie and expose the last few remains of what had been Sirius Black only minutes before. Nathalie had just been given a short reprieve; she may even survive if her wounds could be tended to quickly enough.

The crowd behind her... not so lucky. Dozens of British purebloods suffered under the assault as over a tonne of burning wood flew over their ranks. This shock got the crowd moving again as many drew their wands to banish the burning wood or do something about the many who were now crying out in pain on the ground. Others had a different reaction.

"Aurors!" Minister Malfoy bellowed even as he drew his own wand. "Take down that beast immediately!"

But Gabby and Harry would not be caught unawares this time. A small mental nudge from spirit to angel gave her all the push she needed to remember Misses McGonagall's lessons on self defense and wind magics, only the old Scott never intended Harry and Gabby to come up with a use for her garden cyclone. She drew her wand. The old wand was cold to her touch, as it always has been, but there was something more. Had anyone been paying attention to the wand itself they may have noticed the faintest hint of whispering.

The little angel pointed her wand straight up and twirled it about in a tight circle. Her cyclone reformed as it had before except this time she pushed herself and her magic to new heights. Wind heavy with

the scent of raw magic turned in a tight circle about Gabby, the bound witch next to her and the two stakes in the ground.

A flash of red appeared on her left. The beam of magic sailed through her winds and bounced off a wingtip. Three more curses appeared, two of them missing and one sliding around her hip before continuing on into the ground behind her.

Gabby held her winds steady and the next magical attack, conjured ropes, turned aside mid-air. An auror tried to banish the burning wood back at her only to have it caught up in the cyclone and thrown into the crowd again. That auror's failure didn't stop others from trying to break through the magical winds and crush her. Spells were now flying about in ever greater frequency... Gabby's winds were holding, but at the same time, her wand and concentration were focused on the wind, not those Harry had called her here to save.

"Aaaaaahhh!"

A pained cry startled Gabby and she looked to the source. Tonks was on her side, a gash tore through her bindings and through her arm. Blood was beginning to soak the metamorph's robes. Harry and Gabby both knew something had to change.

Harry thought of the answer first. Since pulling out her wand, Gabby's only used her wand magic and not her more angelic abilities. With new found purpose, he added fresh feelings of comfort and support to his angel hoping it would have a particular effect.

It did.

As Gabby held her wand aloft, she began to feel better... lighter... more loved. Her stance loosened and her wings stretched open and up. She felt so peaceful even in the center of this magical crossfire that she began to radiate peace and love as she did upon first arrival. And why wouldn't she? Harry was with her. He loved her and he would show her what do.

On the other side of Gabby's magical winds, feelings of love and peace once again swept through the crowds. Their anger, aggression and prejudices all bled away until the spell fire ceased. Even Malfoy, who still remembered why he should be trying to capture the girl, could not lift his wand even to aim. A voice of

reason in the back of his mind told him that he should consider trying to get away now, but Gabby's thrall was powerful... more powerful by far than the Imperius Curse or the Veela thrall of Gabrielle's family. She had them body and soul until she eased off.

The winds fell. For a brief moment, the only sound in all of Hogsmeade was the gentle hum of Gabby's reformed halo as it floated delicately above her head.

But there was much to be done. Gabby's wand lowered and her concentration passed from magical defense to the needs of her loved ones. She looked around. There was a barrel to the side of the Ministry's platform. Upon spotting the barrel, Gabby levitated it over to the foot of Nathalie's stake. Three quick flaps of her wings had Gabby standing on the barrel top, her eyes level with Nathalie's navel. Perfect.

Harry prodded his Angel into releasing a bit of the pain she felt at seeing Nathalie's body burnt and bleeding this way. From head to waist, she was a patchwork of skin, blisters and burn marks. Much of her clothing and all of her hair was ash. Little skin was left on the Veela's legs and black char had taken parts of her feet already. All this and the Veela was still alive.

Gabby shuddered once before wrapping her arms, her body and her wings around cousin Nathalie. A soft trill left her throat, one that sounded like weeping. Moisture lined the angel's eyes. Soon, as shower of crystal clear tears began to fall on Nathalie's burned and abused body.

Out in the crowd, wizards and witches felt Gabby's pain and wept in magically induced sympathy.

"...oh... oh, dear listeners... if you could only see the- well, angel is the only word that comes to mind. She's crying on the Veela. Is she- what? Is she mourning or healing the woman? Oh, Richard, what have we done?" The announcer's voice carried over the crowd and over the airwaves.

"I- I don't know, Stephen. I really don't feel good about this anymore. Is... is she like half-phoenix, this girl? She has the purest white feathers I've ever seen on any bird and I've never felt so good as when she appeared before us, not even when I hired out two

unicorns for my niece's birthday two years back. If she is a light creature then why is she crying on a lowly Veela?"

"I wish I knew, Richard. I wish I knew."

Stephen and Richard had a much bigger audience now. The room full of teens in southern France was joined by dozens of I.C.W. and other international magical bodies who had an interest in Magical Britain. News even spread to the general public where many shopkeepers and restaurateurs in Magical France tuned in the British wireless station. They tuned in first to witness Magical Britain's most recent crime against Magical France. They really began to pay attention when the angel appeared. Every magical sentient in Europe knew there was only one angel that these Englishmen could be referring to. The Girl-Who-Lived, the bearer of Potter's Mark. Gabrielle Delacour.

Gabrielle's wings unfurled. She pulled herself back and looked up at her cousin. Nathalie was no longer at risk of blacking out. In fact, the Veela was wide eyed and staring at her feathery cousin in wonder. One unblemished toe edged out towards the barrel Gabby stood on. An unblemished toe at the end of a smooth, healthy leg attached to a perfect body, crystal blue eyes and shimmering silver-blond hair. Apparently, angel tears were more potent healing magic than phoenix tears were.

"Little Angel. Little Angel, please get me down from here." Nathalie called.

Inside of Gabby, Harry still remembered that one of theirs was still injured on the ground nearby. Tonks. After giving Gabby another spiritual hug, he slipped outside. The crowds gasped.

"I see a few tears left in your eyes, Gabby. Can you give them to Tonks?" The angel nodded and hopped off the barrel with flared wings. While Gabby went to heal Tonks, Harry began to untie the knots still holding Nathalie aloft.

"Wizards and witches, boys and girls, the ghost of Harry Potter is now helping the angel free the Veela. What a turn of events this is." The WWN announcer called, Gabby's focus was beginning to wane and her thrall was weakening. "The angel just healed our condemned prisoner and is now approaching that girl who tried to

stop Minister Malfoy earlier. It... yes, it appears she intends to heal the girl's arm. The girl must've been winged during that storm of spells a minute ago."

Lucius Malfoy was marshaling his resolve. He couldn't let Gabrielle escape again, not after the first time. Voldemort wouldn't care that he was the Minister, if his prized bird-girl got away a second time there would be hell to pay.

"What in Merlin's name are all of you doing?" Lucius shouted at the top of his lungs. "Aurors! Rebind the prisoners and seize the girl and Potter!"

There were many in the crowd who were shocked at the Minister's demand. Shocked, yes, but it looked like they may still follow through with his commands. He was their Minister after all.

"Wait!" Harry shouted to the crowd, having finally freed the nearly nude Veela. "How can you continue as you are? Don't you see what's happening?"

"A criminal is being executed." Malfoy stated, Sonorus reapplied to his voice. "She was tried and found guilty just like Black. We did you a favor boy, we got rid of the man responsible for your parent's deaths."

"You know as well as I do that Sirius didn't betray my parents, Death Eater! Pettigrew did, Sirius is innocent! I heard your miserable excuse for a trial. It went just about as I expected it too; none of your witnesses had to prove they were telling the truth. You accepted hearsay and rumors... and what you said about Nathalie was plain ridiculous. I challenge you to swear a binding magical oath attesting to what you know about Sirius Black and Nathalie Fournier! I challenge you to swear to your story about how you idiots kidnapped Gabrielle ON HER NINTH BIRTHDAY and tried to have her executed in courtroom seven! I challenge you to swear as to your real involvement with Lord Voldemort!"

Hearing the Dark Lord's chosen name aloud caused as many gasps and shouts as it always did, the fools.

"As famous as you are, Potter, you are just a boy and a dead one at that. Nothing you say has any bearing in the real world." Lucius responded.

Harry turned to address the crowd in general. "Everyone listen! This man is leading you to ruin, you can't keep turning a blind eye to the truth!"

"Lies! Don't listen to him! The Ministry always does what is best for its subjects!" Dolores Umbridge yelled above all others. "Why, the deranged little fool is just following in his worthless mudblood mother's footsteps. He'll be the ruin of Magical Britain if you believe him!"

Harry chilled the air around him in his anger. Behind Harry, a newly healed, and newly herself, Tonks handed her outer cloak to Nathalie to keep the cold and the perverts at bay. They and Gabby all stood by Harry, with one wand between the three of them, in support of his stand against Malfoy.

Harry looked out across the crowd. There were no children that he could see though there were some young adults... maybe a few of the upper year Hogwarts students. More than that, these were the very people who promoted the pureblood lifestyle. These were the people who had tea and biscuits as muggleborns were rounded up and taken to Azkaban. These were Umbridge's peers; they might have given her a medal if she ever succeeded in killing Hermione. These were Malfoy's peers; people who sneer down their noses at 'their lessers' in public, and snarl as they torture muggles in private. He would give them one last chance to redeem themselves.

"Just go home. Turn around and go home." Harry pleaded. "If you turn back now, you will be spared the fate of those who delight in inflicting misery upon others... the fate of those who enslave or kill other races due to a sick sense of blood superiority. I beg you to turn from this place and go home."

Dolores was Vernon purple now. She stepped forward, not even bothering to ask her Dear Minister for permission.

"You worthless little bug! How dare you speak so to your betters! I can't believe that my country revered such a horrible half-blood animal such as yourself. It's a pity that the Dark Lord didn't take you

with him when he died!" She turned to the aurors and the less savory D.M.L.E. 'officials' who were still providing security for the nights celebration. "What are you fools waiting for? Kill them!"

A wall of wands rose around Harry and company. The ghost immediately faded out to rejoin his Angel.

Once more Gabby raised her magical cyclone, only this time it was even tighter with higher winds than before. The area she had to protect was smaller. Even as the wall of wizards prepared to cast their spells, Harry and Gabby both understood that they would have to do something different this time... something more. Harry filled his Angel with the desire to do what was right. Gabby immediately took his desire as her own, for she desperately wanted his praise, to feel pride in doing his will... her Lord's will.

Gabby's wand sang in her hand and as she continued to stoke the magical winds. A small point of light formed at the end of her wand to match the blue-white of her halo. A new idea entered Little Angel's mind. It was a theme that did not come from Harry, though both he and Gabby agreed with it as soon as it became known. These people are bad. The idea whispered. They must be punished. When Gabby embraced the idea as Harry's and as her own, the point of light at the end of her wand flared brightly.

Gabby closed her eyes and spoke. She spoke in that special way that would allow anyone to understand her words so long as they heard them.

MY LORD OFFERED YOU A WAY OUT

A few spells made it through the winds, but with so much dust in the air, none of the aurors new exactly where to aim... a few of them ended up cursing each other.

She raised her left hand to the level of her twirling right hand before bringing them both down along with her wings. As her wings spread and lowered, so too did her halo.

AND YOU CHOSE TO BE BAD PEOPLE

Where the first few spells which cleared the winds splashed harmlessly against her body, not even one curse made it that far

now in spite of the increasing volume of spells shot off. Every curse that neared the great humming ring of light fell into it as though pulled. With each spell swallowed whole by the halo, it grew greater still and with every surge of magical strength, the halo's hum grew to new heights. From its start as a low buzz it came to ring with the tone of a great church bell, and its volume was near what one would find inside of that bell.

Amidst all of the distractions, Gabby continued to perform her assigned task. When her hands and wingtips all fell even with the horizon, the two meter wide halo shot out to the magical cyclone around them and sparked a magical flash that temporarily blinded anyone looking.

AND BAD PEOPLE MUST BE PUNISHED

Gabrielle's cyclone became a violent vortex of magical fire which quickly rose and expanded with the same speed of the original halo when it freed itself from Gabby's control. Blue-white fire surged out faster than anyone was prepared for, reaching the front line of aurors and D.M.L.E. officials... and Delores Umbridge... in less than a second.

Some in the crowd may have attempted to apparate or portkey out, but due to the Ministry's own ward schemes portkeys failed and attempts to apparate out lead to horrific splinchings.

Others may have been quick enough to cast a shield charm at the last second or even a charm against fire, but no single wizard or witch no matter how powerful they were could have held firm against the righteous fires of the Angel Gabrielle.

After watching, listening to and commenting on the proceedings, the last words to reach the WWN radio network before static filled the airwaves was an unfinished plea, "Merlin help u-"

Just over a kilometer away, Draco, his mother and the two Greengrass sisters started as a frightening sound erupted from the village at their back. A light conversation about House Greengrass and its historical backgrounds was abandoned as the four turned to look back down the trail.

The Lady and three teens of good breeding all stared with growing horror at the great pillar of blue-white fire which was quickly devouring Hogsmeade Village whole.

Draco snapped out of his daze when a sound to his left proved to be his mother; she fell to the ground in a dead faint. Looking back at the greatest spell Draco had ever witnessed or even heard tell of, he found it likely his mother fell after concluding that her husband was now dead. As he levitated his mother off the trail, he found little comfort in his own logic. As powerful a man and wizard as Lucius Malfoy was, he could not have stood up to a magical firestorm such as that one.

Only a few hundred meters up the trail, standing in the same spot he occupied when Harry Potter disappeared, Albus Dumbledore wept.

"How could you, Harry?" He called through the window. "How could you? All those people gone... who will lead them to the light now that you have denied them? How could you do such a thing?"

At the Delacour family home in southern France, friends and family were assembling in the main parlor to recover or fall apart or make sense of it all or whatever it was each of them felt they needed to do at the time. The only thing that each could agree on was that the family needed to be together when Little Angel finally felt that her tests were over and she could return home.

With Harry.

And Nathalie.

And Tonks.

And, if possible, Sirius.

-o\0/o-

A kilometer or two to the west, a loose group of broom riders, perhaps a dozen or more, and their master watched as Hogsmeade turned to ash.

"My Lord?" A woman called to the one figure who had no need of a broom to stay aloft.

"This changes things." He murmured. His tone warned that further interruptions would be unwise.

After a few minutes of silence, the broomless Lord called to his devoted once more. "Follow!"

He disappeared and soon his devoted began to track their Lord by answering the call of their Dark Marks.

-o\0/o-

"Harry?" Gabrielle called from the center of a charred and smoldering wasteland that had once been the only fully magical village in all of Britain.

"Yes Angel?" Harry called back. He took one last look at what he thought was once the butt end of a wand before dropping it to the ground.

"I- ummmnnn..."

Harry turned to the little witch. She was looking up the trail heading to Hogwarts.

"I want to go get my wand back."

Harry looked up the trail too. Behind the two, Nathalie and Tonks both took interest.

"Albus Dumbledore's got it, Gabby. He's not likely to give it up without a fight." Harry cautioned.

Gabby looked down at her feet. "I know."

"Can you make him give it back? " Harry studied her closely.

"Do you think I can?" Gabby looked up Harry.

Looking up with her head tilted to one side, Gabby's eyes were innocent and impossibly wide. Out of the corner of his eye, Harry saw Gabby's left shoe etching a soft line in the dirt beneath her feet.

Harry smiled and his smile forced Gabby to grin not so innocently along with him.

"Yeah, I think so." Harry said finally.

"Me too." Angel replied.

"Okay."

In the middle of a burned out magical village, Harry and Gabby stood there and smiled at each other.

"Harry?" Tonks stepped up to the two. Her French needed work and she hoped that she was just wrong about the what little she understood of that talk she just overheard. "Can we leave now?"

Without looking away from his Angel, Harry replied. "Not yet, Tonks. We've got to run a little errand over to Hogwarts first."

"Harry, please don't. I just want to get back to France now. Think of Nathalie... you... you can't be serious."

"Of course I can't be Sirius-" Harry stopped at Tonks's glare. "Look. You can use Gabby's wand to make a portkey if you know how... or you can use it to fix up Nathalie and yourself and you can follow us. Don't think you can force us home early when there's one more task left unfinished."

Tonks flinched, accepting that she would have to just follow along. Yes, she could make a portkey, but she'd still need a wand on their journey south and there was no way she was stealing an angel's wand.

"Fine. Have it your way." Tonks held her hand out, palm up, to Harry and Gabby. "I'll just transfigure us some things to keep warm with."

The remains of Hogsmeade were actually still quite warm, but heavy snow banks weren't that far away and Nathalie was still starkers under Tonks's cloak.

As Gabby offered her wand to Tonks, Harry spoke up again. "Get changed Gabby. I want you in fighting form as soon as old Albus figures out he's got company."

"Yes, Harry." She answered, still smiling. Yes, Sirius had just passed, but she could feel it deep inside that her Lord was comfortable with that so she was too. "Oh! Can I show you a new trick?"

At Harry's eager nod, Gabby dropped to her knees and began to pray out loud.

-o\0/o-

It was lunch time in the Ministry of Magic Atrium. One junior grade auror was manning the lobby's wand checkpoint, muffin in hand and runic crossword spread out before her.

A shadow crossed over her puzzle.

"Wands, please..." She droned without bothering to look up.

Her request was met with silence. No wand was passed into her waiting hand. She looked up.

Before the young witch stood a large group of black cloaked wizards and witches, all wearing white or silver bone faced masks save one. His mask was gold.

"Swear allegiance to me, Lord Voldemort."

The auror trainee's mouth dropped open in shock, body frozen in fear. She didn't respond to his command. Too bad for her.

"Avada Kedavra." Lord Voldemort called out the killing curse in an almost casual tone.

As the now dead junior grade auror slumped bonelessly to the floor, Voldemort walked past her desk.

"Morsmordre!" Bellatrix Lestrange shouted to his right, releasing the gruesome visage of a glowing green skull and coiling snake into the atrium above the Fountain of Magical Brethren.

A power vacuum was getting filled today even if some employees deep in the bowels of the Ministry building didn't know that one existed.

-o\0/o-

"He's dead." Narcissa whispered.

"I believe so, Mother." Draco responded. "There has been no word from Hogsmeade since it happened. With everyone of value there to witness the trial, I doubt that there are enough wizards left in the Ministry building to do more than answer the floo."

Narcissa looked around to see herself in a room she recognized. The Hogwarts Hospital Wing.

"Would you believe this is the first time in my life that I entered this wing as a patient and not just a concerned friend?"

"I wish I could say the same." Draco almost smiled at his mother's question.

Draco held his mother's left hand between both of his. A discreet cough behind them caught his attention. It was Daphne.

"Would you two please stay with Mother?" Draco asked the Greengrass sisters. "I need to speak to the Headmaster."

Astoria nodded immediately. Daphne had other ideas.

"My parents are still at home; I floo'd them to say we were well half an hour ago. May I go with you when you speak to the Headmaster? Father will want to know what this means for his business interests."

With everything on his mind at the time, Draco missed the glare Astoria shot her older sister.

"Mother?" Draco looked to Narcissa for approval, which she gave. "Very well."

Young Lord Malfoy kissed his mother's hand, took Daphne's and left the Hospital Wing.

-o\0/o-

Lunch in the Great Hall was an extremely quiet affair. Expelled muggleborns from three houses lined either side of Gryffindor Table near the Head Table, not wanting to be too far from the Headmaster's influence. Albus himself had just come down from his window overlooking Hogsmeade. There would have to be some kind of speech to the children present before he set off to fix what he could of this tragedy. A few of the other professors were also on hand, some knowing of what just transpired and others still unaware.

Into this, Draco and Daphne walked arm in arm.

"Headmaster," Draco called, "may we have a word with you?"

"If it's about the tragedy that's befallen us in Hogsmeade, young man, then please have a seat." Albus answered. "I shall make an announcement to the school, as there are many here who know nothing of what transpired this morning."

Both Slytherin teens nodded and sat down at their house's table as requested. Other students and 'guests' of Hogwarts in the room looked on with mistrust though a few sitting along Ravenclaw and Hufflepuff Tables were merely curious upon seeing two students show up that were not here for the Holidays. Ron glared at Draco with twice the vitriol that anyone else put into it. Bloody Slytherins.

Before the weary Headmaster could signal for everyone's attention, the Gryffindor House ghost blew into the Great Hall and up to the Head Table.

"Ah! There you are Headmaster! So nice to finally find you." The buoyant spirit called.

"How can I be of assistance, Sir Nicholas?"

"I thought you might like to know that I was just having the most exciting conversation with one of my little lions on the way up the path. He had the most remarkable story to tell, let me tell you-"

Albus chose to interrupt. He had a speech to give before he could get on with his real work outside of castle walls. England needed him. A power vacuum of massive proportions was just created and

without his assistance both the Ministry and Magical Britain as a whole were bound to fall into anarchy.

"I'm afraid I have no time for remarkable stories, Sir Nicholas. I have important announcements to make."

Nearly Headless Nick looked at the old man with genuine impatience. "I'm quite sure, Sir, that you will want to hear this one."

Albus was about to refuse Nick a second time when he saw someone enter the Great Hall... someone he really didn't expect to see. Nymphadora Tonks strolled up the center of the Great Hall like she owned the place.

"Wotcher." She called in greeting as she neared the Head Table.

"Nymphadora." Albus greeted. He put on a mask of warmth and greetings, yet inside he was alarmed. "What a pleasure to see you well again and back in your home country. However did you escape confinement?"

"The name is 'Tonks', sir... and escape?" Tonks snorted. "I work for them now. Practically a frog myself! Je ne suis pas un ananas. That's like French for 'I'm a banana' or something. I know I've got some more studying to do before I get all cultured and snooty on you lot, but I'm working on it."

Albus didn't know what to make of the Hufflepuff auror metamorph that just admitted to defecting... or committing treason depending on what laws you apply or which officials you influence.

"I'm glad to hear you're doing well then. May I inquire as to what brings you here today? Have you by any chance recently passed through Hogsmeade?"

Tonks demeanor changed at his question. She squared her shoulders and clasped her hands behind her.

"Albus Percival Wulfric Brian Dumbledore. On behalf of the French Ministry of Magic, the Grangers, the Delacours and Harry Potter, I ask that you hereby return the wand which you have wrongly stolen from one Gabrielle Delacour forthwith, immediately, without delay and so on and so forth. What say you sir?"

Very aware of the crowd watching, he decided to play ignorant of her claims. Off to the side, he noticed Fawkes flash into the hall and look for a roost in the enchanted ceiling's framework. An omen, but what did it mean?

"I'm afraid, my dear that you are mistaken. I have nothing that belongs to that little girl." Albus let his eyes twinkle over a grandfatherly smile. "If Miss Delacour continues to disagree with me, I'd be more than willing to discuss her claims in my office whenever she has time to speak to me."

Tonks nodded as if his answer was a foregone conclusion. "Can't say I didn't try..." She muttered before turning around and breathing in deeply. "HE SAID 'NO'!"

As Tonks's shout trailed off, a beautiful woman with silver-blond hair and blue eyes pushed the entry doors to the Great Hall wide open. Before Albus could even contemplate the implications of having a Veela open his doors when one was so recently on trial and burning at the stake, a white blur shot through his hall's now open doors.

The white blur resolved itself into a young girl, an angel, who literally flew into the hall before flaring her wings and coming down to land right in the middle of Hufflepuff Table. As soon as Gabby's shoes touched the table, her silver chained wand was in hand and energy was pooling between her wingtips to form her next halo.

You have my wand old man...

Gabrielle cried, once again making sure that everyone could understand her.

...and I want it back!

Albus paled. This was the girl who just gutted Magical England's upper class. Then he saw what she held in her right hand.

Of course. The wand he took from Grindelwald in Nineteen forty-five. The Elder Wand. The Deathstick. The wand Death itself is said to have created by it's own hand. How else could she cast a single spell and kill so many?

Albus stood slowly and, with a silent magical nudge to the house elf staff, banished the Head Table and all four house tables. Gabby dropped the last meter to the floor but you can't throw an avian off balance by making her fall. Noticing the sour expression crossing their Headmaster's face, all of the students present stood and moved to the side walls. Tonks moved aside as well, though the three professors who remained all seemed to hold their ground nervously. Professors Vector and Grubbly-Plank were both wide eyed even with their wands out. D.A.D.A. wasn't their specialty. Professor Mason was here specifically for that subject but he was clearly not keen to provide a live demonstration of his abilities, not when Albus Dumbledore was the real target and not when his eager opponent just cleared out a whole village full of aurors, duelers and dirty scrappers.

Finally, Headmaster Dumbledore felt himself ready to answer the little girl's challenge.

"How dare you come into this castle and demand things of me? How dare you do what you did in Hogsmeade? How dare you come into this hall and threaten the lives of my students?"

Harry desperately wanted to go outside and have it out with Albus himself, but he knew Albus would lock him up in that ghost freezing spell right off the bat at a time when Gabby needed every advantage she could get. She would have to speak for herself, though he could and would give her all the love and encouragement he could offer. Like any good girl who is asked questions by a grown-up, she answered them.

I want my wand because you stole it. I punished those people because they were bad. I am not going to hurt anyone... I want my wand.

Albus held his wand higher, hand tensed, expecting some kind of underhanded strike from the deceptively innocent looking child before him. "Lay that wand on the floor young miss. Put it down and reverse your transformation. Do these things and I will be as gentle as possible in my handling of you as we purge the darkness from your soul."

Gabby resisted the urge to do her puppy-dog eyes routine... didn't think it worked the same way with an angel face. Fortunately, she had something better.

Me? 'Dark'?

There were many muggleborns in the hall which, in the time since they turned eleven, came to find that mythical 'light' creatures like unicorns and phoenixes weren't fairy tale legends at all. They were merely part of a hidden magical world that 'muggles'... what a demeaning word really... that muggles couldn't see. But now, for the very first time, they were looking at an angel; she had wings and halo and she spoke in tongues. This group didn't need Gabby to prove she was light; they took it as a known fact.

She did prove it just the same.

Gabby once more immersed herself in the love Harry was showing her and she in turn released that love into the room in general. The effect was immediate on anyone in the room that wasn't using advanced occlumency to push aside her angelic thrall.

"A well ordered mind can resist magics such as the Imperious Curse and your thrall, young lady." Albus stood firm while all around him wizards and witches had an experience that civilization has always described as religious and not magical in origin. More than a few of them were weeping openly.

When Gabby refused to lower her thrall at his words, Albus finally accepted that words alone would not win him the day. He took a moment to mentally revise his own spell library to focus on magics that would be effective against her personal immunities and would not risk the innocent witnesses in the room.

Gabby didn't immediately see Albus move his wand, but she did see the effects as a tangle of ropes flew down the center of the ancient stone hall. Again, McGonagall's lessons in the Delacour side garden came to Gabby's aid.

Turn away!

She jammed her own wand towards the incoming Incarcerous before jerking it off to the side. The ropes which were nearly upon

her flew away harmlessly. Inside, Harry noticed that Gabrielle said 'Turn away' rather than the spell incantation 'declino' he remembered that wand movement matching. How odd.

Albus cast again and this time the ground under Gabby's feet began to shake. Her wings came down in a quick beat, lifting her feet off the ground. A second and then third beat brought her higher into the air. In another first for Gabby, her halo stayed put on its own without following her wings mid-flight.

Thinking the little angel wasn't used to flying and dueling at the same time, Albus twirled his wand to create a wind of his own. Powerful gusts rushed down the length of the hall, reaching Gabby much faster than the binding spell had. He was right about her experience level too. Gabby was thrown back end over end until she hit the floor and rolled several times.

OWW!

This wasn't a spell, she was honestly hurt. Gabby was now too distracted by pain to actively push her thrall, but it didn't fully leave her. On the other hand, she really didn't need it with her current duel's witnesses. In fact, some of them were beginning to come out of their euphoria enough to realize that Dumbledore was fighting an angel right in front of them.

"You cannot hope to best me, Miss Delacour." Albus called, Sonorus carrying his voice so he need not yell. "I have far too much experience in magical dueling to be beaten by a mere child no matter how much potential she may have."

I can beat you. I will!

Gabby struggled to get up. At least the Great Hall was long enough that Albus couldn't easily take advantage of her fall from the opposite end. Slowly she began to walk the length of the Great Hall. Gabby and Harry were both using the walk as a short break to think. Albus would use the same trick again... even a nine year old could see that. She needed a way to beat it. She needed a way to stop his magic from getting too close to her.

Colin Creevey was one of the many muggleborn students seemingly entranced by the magical battle. He was also the first to speak out from the sidelines.

"Just give her the wand, Sir. Please!"

"Yes, give her the wand!" "Here, here!"

Several more shouts of support for Gabby echoed up and down the lines of students.

"Do not judge her by what you see." Albus called to his students. "Have you learned nothing in this castle? Darkness can hide in the guise of light. The girl that walks among you killed hundreds of innocent wizards and witches only just this morning! Were you not listening to the wireless reports from Hogsmeade? She destroyed the whole village!"

They were not innocent! Sirius was innocent! Nathalie was innocent! You don't know what you're talking about!

Gabby made it back to the middle of the hall. As expected, Albus cast his ground shaking spell again. Also as expected, Gabby rose into the air in an instinctive response to having her perch disturbed. This time, Gabby started her own wind spell in anticipation of Albus's attack. Just as in Hogsmeade, a tight wall of wind flared around her, though with almost no dust on the floor, the winds were nearly invisible here.

Instead of meeting wind with wind, Albus focused on the wand in Gabby's hand and summoned it.

Both angel and spirit were caught off guard. Gabby's wand slipped out of her grasp just as the Headmaster intended but it did not fly to his hands. After all, it was on a chain that was looped around a delicate, feathery neck. Gabby's wind spell collapsed as she fought for control. She jerked forward in the air, one hand reaching at the chain biting into her skin while the other tried to wrap itself around her wand. Angel wings beat frantically in a bid to hold her position but she lost a bit of ground between each beat.

"No!" It wasn't Creevey, but the call was taken up by over a dozen students this time. Ron, Ginny and a few of the other students were fingering their own wands.

Gabby got her right hand back around the wand pulling against her neck just as Albus was forced to stop summoning her wand and conjure a stone shield.

With an angry shriek, Nathalie flew past her cousin, leathery wings carving a path through the air as Veela fire poured out from her open right palm. She may not be an angel and she may not be a witch but she was Veela, and Veela were not to be trifled with.

The Headmaster's stone wall held firm against Nathalie's fire, but it was not raised to counter two opponents. Albus turned to meet the white blur barely visible past Nathalie's pyrotechnic display only to find that it was Gabby's turn to be one step ahead.

Fire taper!

Once again, in the back of Gabby's mind, Harry wondered at her wording. The incantation was 'ignis candesco' and the spell was to light candles... in other words to ignite tapers. Back in the world outside, Gabby's spell did exactly what she wanted it to. Albus was forced to drop his wand as it burst into flame. Intent, see?

Albus began to feel panic as soon as he realized that an angel was standing to his left and a Veela was standing to his right... and they were both looking at him.

Where is it?

Albus had to concentrate a moment to understand her question. She still wanted her wand? But why?

"You seem to have a wand that works, Miss Delacour." He looked at the wand in her down covered hands. "Fifteen inches long, made of elder wood and a Thestral's tail hair. As a matter of fact, I took that wand from Gellert Grindelwald. I must confess... I don't understand why you still need Harry's wand if that one works so well for you."

Even with Harry inside, Gabby slipped back into her normal human form. She held the wand up between them, her focus on the wand and not the wizard behind it.

"It's cold." She said softly. "I don't like it. Harry's wand is warmer... I... I'm sure it wouldn't have sung at me when I punished the bad people in Hogsmeade."

Albus thought he'd been surprised enough for one day, but that one floored him again.

"'Sung' you say? It sang to you?" Gabby nodded.

Beside her, Harry reappeared. "Look, Albus. We want Gabby's wand back. I only took this one after you filched hers on her birthday."

Gabby spoke up. "Give me my Harry wand and I'll give this one back."

Albus's eyes widened at that offer. "You would return that wand to me?"

"Uh-huh." Gabby nodded again. "But you can't fight me again and you have to let us and Harry go back."

Albus considered his options carefully. Granted, he'd much rather Gabrielle have no wand at all, but that is not an option he can make happen today... the odds are too heavily stacked against him now. He was reduced to choosing between two evils in his mind... though he would have to put much thought into Gabrielle's actions today. They were not what he expected. As she promised, there were no deaths, and in spite of his loss, he wasn't even seriously wounded.

"You win, Miss Delacour. I shall return your wand."

A melodious call sounded from high in the ceiling supports. With a flash of red and gold feathers, Fawkes dropped from his perch above and turned through a slow, graceful spiral path until he came even with Albus's shoulder. As the phoenix came to rest on his human perch, Gabby's eyes lit up.

"My wand!" She skipped forward and eagerly plucked the holly and phoenix feather gold chained wand out of Fawkes's grasp,

negligently slipping a silver chained replacement into the same spot. Overflowing with happiness, Gabby pranced around in circles giggling and looking at her Harry wand until the change took her again. She only stopped after accidentally bumping into Nathalie, who was now a hot silver-blond again.

"You're lucky she even gave it back, you know." Harry said to Dumbledore.

"I must agree with you there, Harry." The Headmaster picked up his new 'necklace'. "Odd. I detect no trace of the coldness young Gabrielle felt."

"Are you done trying to steal my girls?" Harry said, a little growl escaping near the end.

Albus nodded slowly. "I may carry this wand, but Miss Delacour is its true master. I cannot use it against her unless she specifically wishes for me to do so."

"Eh, Harry!" Tonks called from behind him. Harry turned to see Tonks and Nathalie both standing very close to Gabby in the center of the room. "Let's get out of here... Apolline's probably going spare right now wondering where you three are."

"Will we see you again, Harry?" Albus asked.

Harry didn't turn back, but he did stop. "Fix the ward so that I can enter and leave as I please. Do that, and you'll surely see me again. Don't do it, and you will wish you never saw me again. Understand, Headmaster?"

"I accept your terms Harry. The castle wards will be changed tonight."

Harry didn't acknowledge Albus's words other than to start moving again. He turned to his friends lining one side of the hall. "Ron! Ginny! Give me a few days and I'll come by again, okay?"

"Sure mate!" Ron shouted back, his sister nodding frantically next to him.

"Potter?" A voice called from the opposite wall.

Harry turned to meet the new voice. "Malfoy."

Draco held his hands up and open. "Peace, Potter. I'm just asking you to come see me one of these nights when you stop by the castle after term starts."

Harry stared at his former arch-rival for a moment.

"They say you're not a prat anymore."

Draco smiled slyly and turned up his nose a bit in response.

"Come talk to me and find out for yourself, Potter."

"I just might." Harry turned away.

With the assembled lunch crowd plus one or two late comers watching, Harry disappeared into Gabby once more. Three females, one Veela, one angel and one metamorph huddled close together as a blue-white ring of angelic power reworked reality around them by replacing Scotland with France. The South of France in particular and the Delacour family seat to be even more so.

-o\0/o-

On Christmas morning, a strange thing happened at the shores of Dover even though none of the people nearby seemed to notice. An unscheduled ferry pulled into the docks, one that the few security personnel actually on duty Christmas morning failed to notice in the least. The guards even failed to check up on the men and women who began pouring off of the ferry in organized groups.

These groups began move away from the ferry with careful efficiency, though it was inevitable that a local would eventually notice one of them...

"Merry Christmas to you." A young girl, perhaps six or seven, called to one of the cloaked men as they walked by her family's front step.

The man stopped and turned to the girl. His companions didn't stop, but they did slow down. "And warm Yule tidings to you, young lady."

"I'm Elizabeth." The girl said. "What's your name?"

"Well, Elizabeth, I'm Oberleutnant Adler Koertig, II Corps."

Eyes wide, she asked, "Are you a Nazi?"

Adler smiled wide. "Heavens no, dear girl. I'm a policeman."

"Oh, okay!" Elizabeth smiled wide and waved at Adler and his men before spinning on her heels and running into her home.

"Do we need to Obliviate her, sir?" Another cloaked man stepped up next to Adler and whispered to him in German.

"No. She'll learn all about us on her eleventh birthday." With that, he turned back to his command. London beckoned and they had a tight timetable.

End Chapter

Chapter Notes: My take on the Cruciatus Curse is that it does all its dirty work in the nerve system and/or the mind. Other bodily systems like a baby growing in its mommy's tummy won't be affected at all. Due to this logic, Nathalie is in no danger of miscarriage due to her torture. Burning at the stake, of course, is trickier. I'm declaring that she was about to lose her child (and her own life shortly thereafter) when Gabby came in and healed her.

I think that I may have been wavering between using the terms 'Magical Britain' and 'Magical England' based on my feelings at the time of writing in various chapters. After going back to the interwebs, I have verified that the Ministry of Magic of Potter canon uses 'Britain'. I think that when the final chapter is out, I may seek to revise my story to stick with the canon 'Magical Britain' despite my personal non-canon preference being the other way. After a bit of research on the UK, I am left with questions as to the full reach of the MoM if they claim to be British and not English. Diagon Alley is in London. Hogwarts is somewhere up in Scotland. Was anything canon in Ireland? I can't remember. It makes me think that someone with a better understanding of this historical back and forth could do a lot in a fic if the MoM were more regional and less omnipotent. Maybe there have been stories like that but I just didn't see that side of them before.

On a similar note, you may have noticed that I typically start angel in lowercase while capitalizing Veela. I find it oddly disconcerting but still use it due to the fact that all my references point to Veela being capitalized and angel usually not being capitalized. Similarly in the Potter-verse, goblin seems not to rate capitalization even though Thestral does. If someone reading knows the answer why, I'd appreciate a PM on the reason (preferably not a review, as I don't want to pad the review count ;)

Insert standard legal disclaimer and boilerplate notes here.

Authors Note: I intended to have this chapter out earlier (like you haven't heard that before (sarcasm)) but when I clicked the keyboard, my story kept embiggening. Therefore, I have split this chapter into two chapters. It seems to work out well anyway.

...as seen previously on The Little Veela that Could...

"I'm Elizabeth." The girl said. "What's your name?"

"Well, Elizabeth, I'm Oberleutnant Adler Koertig, II Corps."

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The Little Veela that Could

Chapter Eighteen: Dog Star

Christmas Day, 1995

A lone auror walked down Diagon Alley. The place was nearly dead, only unlucky souls like him who had been selected for holiday patrols were about. His more politically connected superiors went to the big to-do yesterday and planned to take the rest of the week off. Lazy bastards. May they rot in hell, the lot of them.

He lit a cigarette with the tip of his wand and moved through the early morning gloom and looked around. Hmmph. The Prophet on display was yesterday's. Was the paper late, or was he just that early?

After a few more puffs of warm tobacco and a half dozen more steps, the auror made his way into the Leaky Cauldron.

"Io, Tom." The auror ground out. "Merry Christmas. Tom?"

Tom wasn't there to greet him. There was some noise coming from the back rooms... sounded like a wizarding wireless set with the volume turned fairly low. The auror took a short trip over to the bar and checked a newspaper that was spread over the counter. Yesterday's paper again. Still no sign of the bar owner.

"Fine. Be that way."

He sat down at the bar and summoned a bottle of the good stuff. There had to be some reward for being alone on the clock on such an important holiday. He poured himself a shot and pulled the paper closer to him. There were a few articles he hadn't quite gotten to yesterday. Bloody low wages, not even enough to rate a used wireless set these days, and no end of year bonus was expected either. If only his grandmother hadn't been born on the wrong side of the wards. One muggleborn in the family tree was one too many in this administration.

As the auror settled in for a short break, the door to muggle London squeaked and opened behind him.

"Oi, Tom!" The auror cursed his luck and braced himself against the bar to get up. "I thought we told you to lock that bleedin' door last Friday."

He turned around, ready to chew out, interrogate and otherwise harass whoever it was that just broke an unwritten rule in the new magical order.

"Alright you... lot..."

Who the hell were they? What in Merlin's name were those things they had with them and what made them stupid enough to draw wands on an auror?

He somehow failed to draw his own wand in response.

"I.C.W.! Stop where you are and keep your hands where I can see them!" One of the men in mottled grey cloaks barked out. Right there above the man's heart were three easy to see letters on a rectangular colored background.

After another half second of indecision in which the cigarette fell from his mouth, the English auror made a clumsy attempt to draw his wand. Five jets of red light caught him in the face.

-o\0/o-

"Do we have to wake up?" Gabby mumbled into Hermione's side.

"Soon, Angel." Harry replied.

The three were in Gabrielle's bed- her dreamworld bed- watching the day's first sun beams as they pierced her bedroom window and etched a pattern on the far wall.

"You're mother's letting us have a lie in on account of the problems we had yesterday." Harry said from his perch at the foot of the bed. One of his arms hovered over the sheets, his fingers played with whatever toes were nearby until a giggle escaped and the foot slid away. "I doubt today will be any fun, Angel. Your Poppa took a potion to wake himself up and went back to the office last night."

Hermione shifted a bit and spoke up. "You did have some rather disturbing news to deliver, Harry. I still don't understand how Dumbledore could learn that He-Who-Mu-" Hermione stopped when Harry put a hand on her leg and stared into her eyes. "...how he could learn that Voldemort succeed in finding a new body for himself months ago and he still never told anyone about it. The monster had months to quietly build his forces up. I don't know anything about resurrection rituals but I can't imagine that they bring you back at full health... and even if they did it would take time to get all of his followers back under his control."

Harry nodded silently at Hermione while Gabby just let it all roll past. Harry was back with her and that's all that mattered to her.

"If only he'd said something sooner." Hermione continued, more to herself than to Harry and Gabby at this point. Preaching to the choir and all that.

For a moment, Hermione seemed to look off into the distance. "What was that, Luna?" The brown haired witch asked the room in general. Or rather, she wasn't speaking to anyone Harry or Gabby could see.

Hermione quickly disappeared from Gabby's bed. She must have woken up. The little Veela made a soft whining noise and tried to burrow into Hermione's now empty warm spot. She pulled a pillow over her head.

"Just five more minutes." Gabby whined.

"Okay, Angel." Harry agreed as he climbed further up the bed. He didn't think Apolline would leave them alone much longer anyway.

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Albus Percival Wulfric Brian Dumbledore was not having a good morning. Not that the previous afternoon or evening were any better. When Harry, Gabrielle, Nymphadora and the older Veela left the Great Hall, there were a few moments of silence before anyone else reacted.

Miss Ginevra Weasley. Albus expected one of his Gryffindors to react first. He even expected a Weasley to be the first to say something. He did not, however, predict just what Miss Weasley would end up doing.

He'll never forget either.

The young girl didn't start yelling immediately. Oh no. She stepped forward... all the way up to the front of the great hall and faced her Headmaster directly. And then, she backhanded him right across the face.

'How could you?' She hissed at him, Albus too shocked by recent events to reply properly or in haste. 'How could you hurt a little girl? How could you call Gabrielle dark?'

Albus was still wondering how he lost the short duel with a small child. Could they not understand that he was the role model they must emulate. Could they not understand that a killer, no matter how cute, could not be looked up to? It didn't matter that she killed 'dark'

wizards- on second thought... it was worse to kill those who had lost their way as a death in the shadows of darkness could offer no hope of redemption. To die in the light meant that you would be rewarded in the next great adventure, however tragic your end was before moving on.

'You cannot defend the girl after she killed so many. Hogsmeade is no more, Miss Weasley, and she is to blame for that.'

'Lucius Malfoy is to blame for that!' If she cared that Draco was listening, she didn't show it. 'You knew Sirius Black was innocent, Headmaster! I know you knew! Harry told me you knew!'

It wasn't easy to calm the room down. Albus wasn't in the habit of sharing the sensitive information he collected and he certainly wasn't in the habit of sharing sensitive information with schoolchildren. In the end, he went back over what details were known from the WWN broadcast and followed it with a heavy moral sermon. Without allowing any other students to interrupt, he professed to the present students and staff. He called the killing of other sentients a dark act. A sin. No matter the reason. Even muggles would agree, he claimed. He made no allowances for self defense and he would not call upon the one or two muggleborn who seemed keen to comment on the issue. There were reasons Professor Binns was restricted in the lectures he could deliver to students. His lectures spoke either of non-violent magical achievements or of the horrors of Wizard-Goblin warfare. There was no Wizarding equivalent to Thermopylae. No broomrider's Battle of Britain. At least, there wasn't as long as Albus Dumbledore had anything to say about it.

Albus dismissed the students soon as he could before heading down to Hogsmeade and surveying the damage for himself. He would soon find enough reasons to stay busy without heading in to the Ministry building before morning.

As it turned out, a dozen or more wizards and witches managed to beat the old Headmaster down to Hogsmeade. Oddly enough, not a one was an auror or a D.M.L.E. official. There were two senior healers from St. Mungos and a handful of support staff, but they found none of the expected burn victims. Gabrielle's fires left no injured survivors. Only ash. Even with magic, it would be nearly impossible to identify most of the victims due to the sheer

temperature at which the angelic firestorm burned. Not even solid bones were left among the ruins.

When a pair of confused teens stumbled into the clearing that had once been a sweet shop, healers swarmed them. Aside from needing some after-the-fact birth control potion, they were fine. They didn't understand why there was no Hogsmeade but then that didn't make them ill. Not physically anyway.

There were others too. Some of the 'wrong sort' that were cleared out in the early morning hours yesterday came home only to find that there was no home to return to. Dumbledore immediately offered lodging in Hogwarts for any locals who did not have family capable of taking them in. The school was also the only local source of floo connections and post owls. Dumbledore offered to coordinate everything, of course.

And then the reporters began to show up. It took that long for the Daily Prophet offices to realize that half their staff had just been immolated. Rita Skeeter and her photographer were among those who failed to report back to the paper's main office in Diagon Alley after contact with Hogsmeade was lost.

Actually, a lot of people would admit to being okay with that once things settled down again.

By the time Dumbledore had finally delegated all of the responsibilities involved in laying an entire village to rest, it was well past midnight. As worn down by the day's events as he was, Albus needed a few hours rest before he could make his move on the ministry building. Unfortunately for the old war hero, he wasn't going to have any more luck in the morning either.

After having a light breakfast and performing his morning ablutions, Albus tossed some floo powder into his fireplace and called out, "Ministry of Magic, Atruim."

The floo trip itself was something that Albus had gone through hundreds, even thousands of times before. His reception at the other end, however...

"Avada Kedavra!" A robed masked man shouted from near the atrium security desk.

Albus wasted no time dodging the green blast, not that it was on target anyway. Another half second and he had his own wand out and twisting in a quick, precise pattern. Without warning, the security desk twisted up and wrapped itself around the Death Eater's body.

"Tell the Master Dumbledore is here!" The trapped Death Eater yelled.

An invisible force pulled Dumbledore's captive back behind cover. Before the old war hero could advance another step, he heard the ding of an elevator door chime. Oh dear, the messenger was traveling deeper into the Ministry, not through a floo connection. Voldemort must already be present. Albus knew he was the only wizard Tom Riddle ever feared, but he also knew he wasn't the true master of the wand in his hands. It wouldn't give him everything and then some as it had before, and he wasn't getting any younger. Even worse, Albus was alone in a Ministry that had not only Tom Riddle himself but an unknown number of his followers. The Dark Mark was already casting its baleful light over the Fountain of Magical Brethren.

He was too late. The power vacuum had been filled.

Albus jabbed his wand at the floor before pulling it around in a hooking motion. Three paces in front of the old wizard, a thick section of the marble floor rose before him. A wall formed that spanned half the atrium width and reached high enough that one would have to ride a broom over the top. Having given himself a reasonable amount of cover, Albus grabbed some floo powder and tossed it over the nearest hearth.

"Diagon Alley!" He called before jumping through a grate full of green flames.

If only that were the end of his troubles. As soon as he popped out of the floo in the Leaky Cauldron, half a dozen assault rifles and an equal number of wands were trained on his form.

"Stay right where you are!" A man yelled from one end of the offensive line.

He still had his wand in hand but he knew better than to make any sudden moves when both wand and rifle were pointed at his chest. Albus froze in place.

Death Eaters would not carry muggle weapons. He looked around. The weapons. The attitude. The uniforms. Three letters stitched over different national flags. The I.C.W. was in England in force. Albus tried to maintain some semblance of authority even in these hectic times.

"I hope you will allow me to clear the fireplace, young man. I just left the Ministry Atrium and I have reason to believe that dark wizards... perhaps even Voldemort himself... may follow me through." Albus looked to the officer.

"So we've heard."

If anything, the armed men in front of Albus seemed eager for him to be proven right. Two men came forward and, with firm grips on the old man's forearms, pulled him through the floor welcoming committee. One other followed. A brief sideways glance revealed that another pair of wizards was watching the muggle side entrance and yet another pair appeared to be standing guard over two prone forms, both wearing British auror's robes.

"If you don't mind, Sir. We have a quick test that can prove you are who you claim to be. We will have to check you for mind control evidence as well." The third man called from behind, likely pointing a wand in Albus's back.

The Headmaster was careful to follow what, so far, seemed to be standard I.C.W. protocol during emergency situations. He understood not wanting polyjuiced or Imperiused individuals getting into sensitive areas. Much to Albus's surprise, he was pulled through the rear of the tavern and into Diagon Alley proper. While the sun was up, very little light was making it into the alley as of yet and most storefronts were still cloaked in shadow. Looking around, it appeared to Albus as though the I.C.W. was attempting to hold one of the most important gateways to the magical world by force of arms. He couldn't see any common wizards or witches out in the open, not that many could be expected on Christmas morning; though there were several I.C.W. wizards nearby. Just as Albus was pulled into a magical haberdasher, a few soft flashes of colored light

lit up the far end of the alley. High pitched cracks echoed between the storefronts shortly afterwards.

No one bothered to explain.

"Alright. Bear your left forearm and no quick movements." An auror standing behind the counter commanded.

Albus complied. Wands were waved and blood was taken. Albus tried not to flinch as one of his fingertips was cut for the sample. As the tests were underway, Albus took in what he could of his surroundings. The men's outfitter's front display room seemed to house another group of I.C.W security personnel, though the store owner and his family could sometimes be seen through a door to the rear. Actually, there were a few more wizards to the rear than Albus remembered ever seeing here before.

"Well, Mister Dumbledore. It appears that you are who you appear to be and that you are under no compulsions today." One of Albus's captors called with a German accent. A German lieutenant if his cloak's national emblem was anything to go by. "You should thank your Merlin that no arrest warrant has been made out for you. If you can swear a non-combatant's oath to me then we can arrange to send you somewhere less dangerous than here."

"I would prefer an oath that leaves me open to lead from the front, Lieutenant..." Albus replied in German, eyes twinkling. He hoped to at least get a name. Perhaps a loophole or two.

"Koertig, Mister Dumbledore. And while you may be a formidable duelist, there are no duels to be fought today, Sir. Unless you'd like to travel south and offer your services to High Command, you will be asked to stay out of harm's way." Adler was in no hurry to return the ex-Supreme Mugwump's wand. "I cannot have you interfere with our operations. You will take an oath that restricts yourself to self defense or you will find yourself on a portkey journey out of the British Isles. That means your talk with High Command would be under less than favorable circumstances. I am told they don't like you much in France these days."

Behind the Headmaster and the Lieutenant, several more high pitched cracks were heard through the partially opened front door.

Albus kept himself from flinching. Those weren't spells, those were bullets and he knew it.

"As I said earlier, there are dark wizards in the Ministry building and I shall require assistance in clearing them out again. There are many powerful and important magical devices in that building that Voldemort may be accessing even now." Albus pushed as much as he could. "The hub of the entire floo network for one. How can you guard your backs with so many floo connections working against you?"

"I am just a Lieutenant, Headmaster. I have my orders and I assure you defending my territory is well within my abilities."

Albus spared a glance over to the store's public floo entry. Blocked, of course.

"I can send you on your way to France or you can leave under your own power..." Lieutenant Koertig held the Headmaster's wand up but didn't return it. "...either way, I'll have that oath."

Albus sighed in defeat and gave the necessary oath. He would not knowingly interfere with I.C.W. personnel nor would he seek to involve himself in the current conflict unless his own life was threatened.

"Good." Koertig handed over the Headmaster's wand. "You may wait in the back with the other civilians until our forward patrol has cleared the block in front of Gringotts. At that point portkeys through our wards will be made available to anyone needing to leave the area."

"And if I can make my own arrangements?" Albus asked as Fawkes flamed in above his companion and landed on one shoulder.

An eyebrow rose, but Koertig was able to suppress further reaction to the light creature piercing his wards. "Outbound only, Mister Dumbledore."

"As you say." The Headmaster nodded before heading deeper into the haberdashery. He wanted to offer safe passage to Hogwarts to any who would accept his offer. He clearly wasn't the only person here having a bad day.

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"Harry."

"Cedric."

The ghost drifted up to his former tournament competitor. Apolline entered the room behind him, Gabrielle clinging tightly to her side.

There was a Christmas tree standing in the corner with a small mountain of presents under it as well as a row of candy and toy filled shoes in front of the fireplace nearby. Christmas was planned to be a mix of English and French traditions, the best of both worlds for Gabby until abductions and violence disturbed Apolline's careful planning. Gabby noted the existence of presents, but wasn't willing to leave her mother's side just yet.

"I'd offer you my hand, but..."

Harry held up his right hand, allowing Cedric to see right through it. Cedric smiled and waved. They should have had a chance to do this yesterday, but as soon as Gabby's Hogwarts-to-France transport ring finished its job, the first words out of anyone's mouth were Harry's.

'Voldemort is back.' He said. It's really amazing what kind of impact three words can have. Those three words certainly charged the atmosphere of the Delacour family household; what was supposed to be a teary welcome home became an urgent debriefing.

Harry spent the afternoon telling and retelling his story from the point he last entered Hogwarts Castle until their return to a never ending supply of family, Ministry and Veela contacts. He was actually the unlucky one there. Given the right prompting, even Gabby could provide a pensieve ready memory of her adventure. At least he didn't have to write a report about the incident. Sorry, Tonks.

Once things finally did calm down for Harry, he spent the rest of the evening with Nathalie. Her body may have been healed, but her spirit... Harry spent his time telling the poor woman everything he remembered about his Godfather. Every joke. Every stupid, childish little prank. Feeling she needed to know, he told her everything that

happened when Harry and Padfoot had one last drink together. Sadly, that didn't last as long as he would have liked. It did get Nathalie to open up. She told Harry about the Sirius she knew. The prankster. The unrepentant bastard. The poor tortured soul whose life revolved around Harry, and only Harry, until a little slice of Veela heaven served herself up to him on a silver platter. To be honest, she first saw him as a famous rogue and an easy target for a woman of her talents. That changed. It only took a few weeks for Nathalie to become territorial in front of her employees. Sirius was hers and hers alone. Veela mating instincts prevailed over social games and the bottom line. Her heart turned. She conceived. Nathalie went on to tell Harry that Sirius once claimed any children of his would have a ghost for a godfather. Harry blushed silver at the thought. He blushed twice as hard when Nathalie made the offer official. Of course he agreed. Later on in the evening, Nathalie's mother arrived and the two Veela had a good cry together as Harry drifted away to look for his own girls.

That night Alain and Susan's aunt Amelia burned the midnight oil organizing and executing a genuine cross-channel invasion. Technically it was a police action authorized by the I.C.W. and green-lit (at the very last minute) by non-magical powers on both sides of the English Channel. The British Prime Minister had a distinctly unpleasant evening upon hearing news that his Magical Ministry counterpart and over a thousand of his subjects attempted to murder an angelic nine year old French girl only to die en masse when she returned fire.

Harry hadn't even noticed the extra house guests until he saw a witch he didn't expect to see go upstairs. Susan was being shown accommodations for the night. But now it was morning and things had calmed down enough that simple greetings could be exchanged.

"I'm very sorry to hear about Sirius, Harry." The older teen wizard continued.

"Thanks." Harry looked down for a moment. "I suppose I should be crying or cursing the fates or something, but then we did get our last laughs in... and I did die first, didn't I. Changes things, that does."

None of his audience this morning quite knew what to make of his comments, but then no-one felt like asking for more and Nathalie wasn't up and around to offer her side of things either. Harry saw a

fresh newspaper on the coffee table near Hermione, Luna and the elder Grangers.

"Is there anything in there I need to read, 'Mione?" Harry called to the witch who seemed to have unusually bushy hair this morning. "Hey! You let your braid out."

Hermione froze, embarrassed that she really hadn't had time to clean herself up yet this morning. "I was just too nervous yesterday, Harry. Someone felt like having one of those kinds of adventures yesterday... only you didn't take me with you this time now did you? Hmmmmm?"

"Sorry," Harry offered sheepishly, "I'll pencil you in for the next life altering situation I get into. Promise."

Before Hermione's parents or any of the other adults in the room could object to Harry's promise, Gabby put her two francs in. "Maybe she can go to the temple with us?"

"Temple? What temple?" Emma asked, somewhat concerned that the littlest Delacour needed no time at all to come up with the next 'life altering situation' Emma's daughter could participate in.

"Gabrielle! It's a church, not a temple, and you mustn't scare Hermione's parents so." Apolline lectured her daughter. She then turned to her guests and lied through her teeth. "She means the church at Domrémy-la-Pucelle, of course. Jeanne d'Arc's home. We've become quite attached to the little village after having Jeanne almost join our family for a short time. We like to visit the church at least once a week whenever possible."

Gabby was about to ask her mother what potion she was on, politely of course, when a subtle Momma-command was passed from big Veela to little Veela. Yes Momma. I'll be quiet Momma.

The awkward moment passed and soon Harry was getting introduced to Susan's parents. Her aunt Amelia was still conferring with Alain and other French officials in Paris and would likely be unavailable for the foreseeable future. Harry did get around to the paper, not that there was much there he didn't already know. True, the Mystic had their own spin on everything, but then it was a much more reasonable spin than Harry had ever seen in the Daily Prophet.

The paper really only had what happened yesterday though. It was only when Segolene turned on a wireless set that this morning's news made its way through the assembled friends and family.

"Bloody hell!" Harry yelled over the wizarding wireless cometary about I.C.W. forces crossing the Channel in the early morning hours. Poor Emma and Daniel were once again spooked when everyone in the room except for them reacted to something they didn't see or hear.

He must have had a look in his eye or something, though.

"Harry James Potter..." Hermione growled. "You will not cross the Channel again. Do you hear me? Leave it to the professionals this time."

"F- fine!" Harry squeaked. "I promise not to go back to England today."

Hermione's face turned a deeper shade of red and she glared harder.

"I, Harry James Potter, swear on my... er... spirit? Yeah. I swear on my spirit that I will not cross the English Channel again until Hermoine Jane Granger gives her direct verbal permission for me to do so. So help me God if I cross her."

Sitting next to the fuming young witch, Luna leaned in a little closer to her adoptive sister and swung one hand around in a tight arc. Plenty of wrist action.

"Crack that whip, sister." She whispered before spying the rooms decorations. "Oh, and merry Christmas of course. Do you suppose the Delacours might be willing to make do with less mistletoe? Nargles, you know."

Christmas? Oh, Christmas! That was today? Harry looked over to his Angel and saw her staring at the presents under the tree.

Harry made a few discreet head nods to Apolline where he went back and forth between Gabby and the tree. Okay, maybe they weren't so discreet. Someone chuckled.

"Little Angel. Come. Let's see what Pere Noel has brought you." Apolline whispered to the girl in her lap.

It seems that under the right circumstances, Gabby could still smile today. Perhaps mourning need not fully drown out the day's celebrations of family, love and joy. Harry drifted over to Hermione a small smile struggling to invade his face.

"You know..." He whispered into her ear, mostly to keep Gabby from hearing. "I think the Wizarding World may have spoiled Christmas for me."

"How so?" She replied curiously.

"I no longer like the idea of strange old men with long white beards breaking into my home as I sleep so they can muck about in the living room."

Hermione went to swat Harry on the shoulder, but all she got was a fist full of cold air.

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"So you're saying that Veela rituals focused on blood sacrifice?" Segolene asked.

"Not all of them." Marion countered. "There is evidence of blood magic and blood sacrifice though. One frieze looked like it could have been a coming of age ceremony. The next one in line was definitely focused on childbirth. I'm not surprised, really... Minimize the influence of males on a culture and the natural cycles involved in fertility and motherhood could become much more important."

Marion, Segolene and Fleur were discussing the photos, videos and wax reliefs that they brought back from the Veela temple. Their group was once again meeting on the upper terrace, but this time Hermione managed to gain admittance. There was a hard sell on her part, a polite plea from Harry and a firm demand from Gabrielle. As convincing as the little silver-blond can be normally, that halo of hers really adds a lot of weight to her side of any argument. Gabrielle was also on the terrace with them, but she was reading a

book she got for Christmas and they didn't expect her to follow anything they said.

Luna didn't bother trying to join the group today. She claimed she didn't need them to tell her what she already knew. Luna did ask permission to raid the house butterbeer stocks. Having lost her old butterbeer cap necklace in England, she wanted to make a new one. In spite of all the dropped hints... she thought they were dropped hints anyway... no one got her a new butterbeer cap necklace for Christmas. She got gold and silver jewelry instead. Didn't anyone realize that nargles would go crazy over such shiny things?

"That would explain why wizards have such negative views of your race though." Hermione said to Fleur while toying with her new gold ankh necklace. Harry got it for her. Actually, Sirius got it for her for Harry. Ghosts can't buy things, not even in the Wizarding World. "Aside from the whole line-of-succession issue of course... I mean, light wizards have always been very much against blood magic in any form. This certainly doesn't make your ancestors dark creatures, though I do see why wizards of the time may have thought they were."

Fleur snorted. "I doubt our beliefs were all that different from other pre-Christian religions. The Romans conquered the world by sword and by wand and the religious leanings of Rome spread across their Empire. When the city of Rome said adieu to their Pantheon in favor of one God, the Empire of Rome followed. It's a shame that most of the old ways were lost."

"We get lucky on a dig every once in a while and find something special..." Marion added. "...but I do wish that we could find a really old pensieve just sitting there with thousand year old... memories..."

Marion looked up at the other witches around the table with realization.

"Could that be what the last room in the temple is? The last door was false, wasn't it?" She turned to Fleur. "You said that the wall rippled like water, didn't you? Memories flow through a pensieve like water. The whole back wall could be a giant memory reservoir of some sort."

"Mother is already working on a list of questions she and Grandmother want Gabrielle to ask Gabriel. Maybe we add to it?" Fleur asked.

Hermione had a notebook open and was already writing furiously even before Fleur finished her question. She was also muttering under her breath in English, but even Segolene couldn't hear her clearly from the next seat over.

"What was that again?" The brunette asked.

"Oh!" Hermione looked up, startled. "Well... I was just thinking how nice it would be to learn more about what Lily was doing."

Three blank faces continued to be blank.

"Harry's mother, Lily." Hermione brushed aside her embarrassment to explain. "I've been reading her last journal and sorting through all the research notes she filled it with. She was absolutely brilliant. Why, if you could just look over her ideas on charms and that one potion for- Sorry. But the point is that the last thirty pages are full of her ideas on how to better protect her family... they must have been in hiding by then...and most of these notes are on blood magic."

"Lily Potter was in to blood magic? I would never have guessed." Segolene offered. "How much did she learn?"

"Enough to beat a Dark Lord." Was Hermione's firm reply. There were no blank faces before her now. "I saw the notes. There is a spell component, of course. Then the blood ritual component; a rune cut into the skin of both mother and son. Anyone care to guess which one?"

At this table, Hermione was the weakest runic scholar present. That didn't mean she couldn't give some Hogwarts upper year Ancient Runes students a run for their money, but here she was the lightweight.

"Sowilo." "Sol." Fleur and Segolene called out simultaneously.

"I know I'm not as familiar with his scar as you two," Marion added, "but I do remember thinking it a bit uneven so either one could work."

Segolene would forever maintain that it was sol. And really, it didn't matter that much based on the relationship. The two runes were separate in time but not in meaning as one evolved from the other. Hermione continued her explanation, this time reverting back to French as she calmed down.

"Either way, we have Lily Potter carving a rune once on her own body and then on her infant son. The blood had to be fresh or her attempt would fail. The required rune was, of course, that of the sun but also of lightning, strength, dominance and... by socialist tradition... victory. If you think about it, it seems that sowilo is the perfect rune to use against a Dark Lord."

"You said the blood had to be fresh cut to be successful. I take it there is more to the ritual?" Fleur prompted.

Hermione's answer was more sedate. "Yes. Lily's blood sacrifice was compounded by the final step. She had to willingly sacrifice her own life in defense of her son."

"So she did and it worked." Fleur murmured.

"Yes... maybe... I'm not sure." Hermione's lack of confidence clouded her words. "She was lucky after a fashion... for her runes to be effective, her death had to come quickly. By killing her straight away and not toying with her for a while, Voldemort unknowingly helped ensure the ward would activate."

"Harry survived and Voldemort was defeated. Granted, the sick bastard recently came back, but that doesn't change the past. But how can you not be sure?" Segolene liked the simple Happy Ending version.

"Dobby?" Hermione called.

POP

"Missy Mione is asking for Dobby? What can Dobby be doing for Missy Mione?"

"Would you please get the journal sitting on the desk in my room? The one with 'Lily Potter' written across the top?"

With a quick head bob, Dobby POP'd away and back again in seconds.

"Here is the Great Harry Potter Sir's Mother's book." The house elf with something akin to reverence. He was looking at the journal and not the witch who requested it.

"Thank you Dobby."

"Dobby is not needing thanking, Missy Mione. Dobby is happy to help."

POP

Hermione gently put Lily's last personal journal down on the table and opened it to a bookmarked page about two thirds of the way through. As her three table mates crowded around, she pointed to a particular section of clean flowing script.

"In the pages before this one, she spends a lot of time trying to reverse engineer a series of spells she found in a blood magic book Sirius managed to sneak to her one evening after a raid in Knockturn Alley. There was a ward close to Lily's in the book, but she didn't like some of the darker aspects of it. She did some arithmancy work on it, changing the sacrificial components from 'forcibly taken' to 'freely given', and succeeded in turning a dark ward light. She settled on the version she eventually died casting only a month or two before that fateful night. Here it is..." She pointed to one sentence in particular, "Here she describes what she hoped her ward would do once cast."

Marion, Fleur and Segolene read silently for a minute before Fleur chose to speak up.

"This is what happens to Little Angel when she's attacked. Exactly. Did spells ever bounce off Harry like they do Gabrielle? Other than the first time?" Fleur looked at Hermione who shook her head in the negative. "How did Harry cast it correctly on Gabrielle without knowing what it is he was doing when his mother miscast it herself? She was the one who knew what she was doing."

"And even then, she was using a type of magic she had no experience in. I'm not sure we'll ever know if Lily miscast her ward or if Voldemort managed to overcome it in some way... though Harry being able to get it right would point to outside interference, wouldn't it? Harry's scar was a near constant source of pain and misery to him, not a source of loving protection as it was supposed to be. And as for Harry succeeding in blindly casting a ward on a little girl he's pinned to underwater... well... being impaled together certainly fulfills the blood sacrifice component. His intent was clear as well. I'm now sure that when Little Angel goes on about Harry's magical kiss saving her life that she's telling the truth." Hermione stopped for a moment to sort through it all in her head.

"But what of the runic component?" Segolene asked. "Little Angel is marked, but not with a rune. You could interpret Harry's kiss as Jeran... maybe... but even that is a stretch. It's not a perfect fit in shape or in meaning. Do you use 'spring' in that he gave her a new lease on life or do you use 'harvest' in that he turned a Veela into an angel?"

"That's not the rune, is it?" Fleur asked.

Hermione shook her head. "Harry's kiss may symbolize the life sacrifice component of the ward, but it isn't the blood sacrifice. Tell me... did Gabby's other scars ever heal properly?"

"No." Fleur answered thinking back to the last time she helped her sister change outfits. "The cross-cut pattern still shows clearly both on her stomach and her back."

"So they are part of a magical wound then. That fits with our other evidence." All four witches knew that such a wound would have been easy to erase were it strictly non-magical. "It's a rune."

"Gebo works well. Harry gave a 'gift' to Gabby in the form of his blood and his life." Fleur replied.

"So Harry's version of the ward didn't key itself to protection from a Dark Lord. Not in the way Lily's did, at least." Marion offered. "It was a shot in the dark for Harry, but circumstances must have conspired with him to give Gabrielle far more protection than Harry intended."

The four young women looked over Lily's journal in silence for a few minutes. Then, without prompting, Fleur recited a prayer that was quickly becoming a favorite in her home:

"My heart is yours, Lord.

Your blood in my veins.

My spirit is yours, Lord.

Your will guides my hand.

Through me you know eternal life;

Through you I know eternal love."

"Don't you see?" Fleur asked the other three. "It's right there... in a poem by angels for angels. 'Your blood in my veins'. It's not figurative... it's literal! Harry's blood did enter her veins."

"So you think Gabrielle is an angel while you and your mother are not because- because of what Harry did for her in the Second Task? Because of his sacrifice? His unintentional use of blood magic?" Segolene asked.

Fleur was still having trouble with the idea herself. She knew about blood type incompatibilities. There was so much they didn't know. She remained silent, staring into the blue skies above and the British wizard practicing his broomriding skills by chasing a new practice snitch, a present from the Bones family.

"I know I am going against conventional wisdom in the Wizarding World, but I think we just proved that blood magic is not inherently dark." Hermione spoke up, returning to her original point. "Surely if we told the world that blood magic was responsible for both Voldemort's original demise and for Gabrielle's current angelic existence, then we could re-open the field for further study?"

"Good luck getting anyone of note to take you seriously." Marion snorted. "Even back in the States we consider that stuff Dark with a capital D. Still, more research on blood magic may be your best bet for a happy future. If Dumbledore was telling the truth and Voldemort

really is back, then we may need blood magic to deal with him again. It seemed to work last time."

"We need to get some questions answered first." Fleur nodded towards the list of 'angel' questions Hermione started earlier. "Without better evidence, I doubt anyone important will take us seriously. I don't want Gabrielle's popularity to draw attention to Veela blood magic unless we can successfully defend the practice. We just found our temple after being adrift for three hundred years. I couldn't stand having to abandon it yet again."

"Fleur?" Hermione called.

"Yes?"

"Do you think..." The younger witch looked down briefly and bit her lip before meeting the Veela's gaze again. "Do you think I might be permitted to visit the temple?"

"It's not for me to say." Fleur returned as she turned a page in Lily's journal. "Grandmother would likely refuse, but if I were to show her how you and Lily can help the Veela cause... she may feel indebted to you."

"Lily didn't put any copywrite charms on her journal. I'm sure Harry would understand if we copied the blood magic sections. Any way we can help the Veela race helps Gabrielle and Harry will like that." Hermione knew this was something Lily would have approved of too. That she bothered to research and then use blood magic was proof enough of that.

"Zoé?"

POP

"Mistress has need of Zoé?" The Delacour house elf asked mid curtsy.

"I have need of an empty journal. Can you find one for me?"

"Yes, Mistress."

POP

-o\0/o-

On the evening of the twenty-seventh, Sirius Black was remembered by friends, family, loved ones and a handful of trustworthy business associates and officials. It was a relatively small affair considering the history of the once proud House of Black, but it seemed appropriate to those in attendance.

Of course, appropriate for Padfoot isn't the same as appropriate for just about anyone else. It's not like anyone wanted to return to the Black's ancestral home in London... and Gabby and company didn't manage to collect the old dog's remains when leaving Hogsmeade, so there was no casket or urn to focus on. And seeing as how Sirius never once in his life entered a church or funeral parlor, neither place seemed right for him now that he was dead. That left two options to choose from. First, they could use a Delacour property. Perhaps if there wasn't a covert shooting war raging across the Channel, then the London penthouse would have been suitable. But there was a shooting war. Really, there was only one option with both the security and the public access necessary.

Besides, Harry was absolutely certain that if it were up to Sirius, the old dog would surely pick Nathalie's place over just about anywhere else. The building was full of Veela. Nathalie's girls. Given the option, Sirius would have preferred dying there too, but then that was before he learned that he was going to be a daddy, so he might have eventually tried to become more respectable. Maybe.

"Welcome to the Garden. My name is Nicole." A young woman... well, she looked young to Hermione but how can you tell with Veela... a Veela greeted Alain and his party in the floo lobby. "Miss Nathalie is receiving friends and family in the ballroom."

Hermione looked around as Apolline and Nicole spoke in hushed tones. The lobby was a beautifully detailed room that wouldn't have been at all out of place at Beauxbatons, save lower ceilings and a few concessions to modern times. It was a rectangular space with two fireplaces, access to a winding staircase and two elevator doors, all set on the longer walls. At one end of the lobby was a set of elaborate entry doors with a heavy floral theme. Hermione couldn't be sure, but there were elements woven in to the carved relief work that looked to mimic the Garden of Eden story. Central to the doors

was pair of nudes reclining under a fruit laden tree as a snake moved through the bushes nearby. At the far end of the room, the glittering lights of Paris could be seen beating back the night and making it difficult to see all but the brightest of stars in the sky above.

"Dopey."

POP

"Yes Miss Nicloe?"

"Take their robes and coats."

"Yes Miss Nicole."

Hermione watched as the house elf bowed to their current hostess and snapped his fingers. She had to keep from flinching when her coat simply vanished from her shoulders.

"Please follow me."

Nicole bowed slightly before opening a door Hermione hadn't noticed yet. It was on the same wall as the Garden's main doors, but set off to one side.

Alian followed Nicole through, then Apolline and her girls. Harry was staying inside Gabrielle for now, though she knew he'd be coming outside later when they were sure the nine year old would be okay. Correction, Harry would come outside when Apolline believed her little girl would be okay. True, Little Angel was feeling down, but she was mostly sad for Nathalie. Harry's acceptance of his godfather's passing meant that Gabby could accept it too. He was in a bar, right? That's where Harry left Uncle Padfoot. Harry said so.

Hermione stepped through the door after the Delacours did. Her parents followed her through, as did Luna and Cedric. Amelia Bones and her family were not invited and, considering the only interaction Amelia has ever had with Sirius was in Bern, they were not offended either. They did send their condolences. Marion didn't feel right about coming, she didn't know the man and there was a lot of work to do organizing and decoding her photographs, videos and notes on the temple.

The group passed through a short hallway with closed doors along either side before reaching a larger door at the other end. Nicole opened that door and stepped aside so Alain's party could pass.

"If any of you have need of something, anything at all, please call on me." Nicole added as the group walked past her.

The ballroom was beautiful, not that any of the guests cared particularly. There was a full colonnade following all four interior walls and a series of windows high above. One of the side walls was almost pure glass with doors leading to a rooftop garden. The opposite wall was lined with a buffet and bar. Dopey appeared just long enough to check on the soup before disappearing again though a human looking employee of the Garden seemed to be serving drinks. The ballroom floor itself had a loose collection of couches, chairs and small tables around which some of Nathalie's family had already begun to settle.

"Daniel. Cedric." Hermione turned to see Alain gathering the men together. "Why don't we get some drinks."

The young witch watched silently as the split was made and a 'girls only' group continued on to Nathalie, who could be seen on a couch at the far end of the ballroom. Hermione looked questioningly at Fleur. Wouldn't Alain want to express his condolences right away?

"Tell me, 'ermione. What do you see?" Fleur asked so that Hermione and Luna could hear. She spoke in English for Luna's benefit. "'o is wiz my cousin right now?"

Hermione looked around Nathalie.

"I see her mother. Madam Mitterrand too. I don't know the other women though." Hermione supplied.

There were at least a dozen of them, maybe more, and every one of them was drop dead gorgeous.

"Per'aps I should 'ave asked 'o you do not see, instead. You do not see men." Fleur stepped closer. "Zey are all Veela, zose women around my cousin. Papa is just keeping our men out of trouble. Even when in mourning, a large group of Veela is too much for even strong willed men."

"I'll admit that those girls are... attractive..." Emma swept her eyes over Nathalie's current entourage. "...but I have faith in my husband and Cedric seems to be a very well behaved young man."

Emma looked about ready to cover her views on Alain's willingness to turn away if not for the fact that the man's wife was standing next to her. Luckily, Apolline chose not to take offense.

"You must remember the differences between Veela and other women, Emma." Apolline supplied. "We Veela can suppress our allure but we can never completely stifle it. Even if every Veela in that group chose to suppress their allures to the utmost- and you will find that there are those who refuse to do so even in polite company- even with every Veela holding back as much as she can, sheer numbers will cause the effect to become overpowering."

"So if Daniel were to walk over to Nathalie right now..." Emma started.

Apolline finished her sentence for her. "He would first look as if pierced by Cupid's arrow about half way there. He would be drawn into the group, completely under the Veela thrall. If he were to make it as far as the center of the group... then he would collapse, completely overcome."

Emma looked slightly intimidated by this knowledge. Hermione appeared to be committing it to memory. Fleur saw Hermione's 'I'm memorizing' face and decided a bit of historical context was in order.

"You may zink it a disadvantage. You may say zat Veela can never assemble in great numbers wiz men present, and zat is true- but zis effect has 'elped our people countless times in ze past. A single Veela is an easy target for slave traders, but a big enough enclave will 'ave ze massed allure as a natural defense. Few slavers 'ave ever succeeded in taking a large group all at once."

Just then, Nicole walked up behind a Veela with long silky black hair on the couch opposite Nathalie's. Nicole tapped her shoulder and whispered into her ear. The black tressed Veela nodded softly to Nicole before reaching over and speaking softly to Nathalie and bussing her cheeks. A moment later, she got up and sashayed over to a set of nearby doors before passing through. Right before the

doors closed, a change passed over her. Her hair flowed as though it were smooth sheets of the finest silk. There was a soft thump and a hiss from over near the bar, but as soon as Hermione and the others looked to see who let it out, all of their men looked away conspicuously... Ced's hand may have been pinning Daniel's wrist to the table. Just one girl, and the thrall hit them from the other side of the room.

"I think that one is back on the clock." Segolene quipped.

Hermione looked closer at the women around Nathalie. Some were dressed properly for a memorial service and some, quite honestly, were not.

"Those girls..." Hermione pointed to a trio of short skirted platinum haired Veela to Nathalie's left who were gossiping amongst each other, drinks and cigarettes waving back and forth. "They look like they just stopped by on their lunch breaks." Hermione snarked.

"Zey work for Nathalie." Fleur confirmed. "Some of ze ozzers do too, but zen not all Veela grow up wiz ze same standards or social backgrounds. You should 'ave seen zose zree before Nathalie got to zem. Zey've cleaned up allot."

Hermione sensed a story there, but was it the life stories of three Veela or was it how the female Triwizard Champion actually knew the life stories of three of Nathalie's girls, three that she identified on sight.

Apolline and Gabrielle were ahead of the teens and reached Nathalie first. As Nathalie received her family, the other 'girls' seemed very interested in Gabrielle. Even the platinum bimbo triplets got closer.

"Don't worry, 'Mione. You are safe for now." Luna said as they slowly caught up to Apolline. "I rather doubt that the Veela high priestesses will be ready to consecrate their altars with the blood of a virgin for a few more years yet."

Hermione turned to Luna scandalized. "What?" She tried to yell as quietly as possible.

"I'm not sure I'll be able to hold out long enough to participate either." Luna sounded dissatisfied that she couldn't too. "I'm considering giving myself to some young buck as soon as I can one find who's interested."

Hermione looked down to hide her reaction from anyone else. Thank Jeanne Fleur and Segolene seemed not to hear.

Luna continued. "That is what Sirius would have wanted, after all. I want him to be happy. Up There."

"I don't think you should take Sirius's wishes to heart, Luna. He was quite the rogue." Hermione tried to rein her adopted sister in.

"You mustn't speak ill of the dead, sister." Luna scolded. "And certainly not at their own memorial service."

The rest of the service was full of quiet moments of reflection with the occasional burst of tears. There were also a few bursts of uncontrollable laughter, but then this gathering was for the most notorious of the Marauders, so at least a few dirty jokes were required.

Just before the end of the service, a representative arrived from Gringotts Bank. There would be a public will reading in London in two weeks as was the pureblood custom. Attendance was not mandatory, and even the Gringott's employee recommended against attending. Nathalie, Alain and Hermione were each given parchments with the Gringotts seal attached. The courier assured them that the documents were not time sensitive, that nothing contained therein could be interrupted by English Ministry officials. All three letters remained sealed for the time being.

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"Goddamn!" Nathalie shouted.

She threw off her silk sheets, allowing the cool fresh air of her bedroom work against sweat covered skin.

"That was one hell of a dream..." She muttered to herself. Not that there was anyone else in the room tonight. Her lover, her mate, was dead after all.

But then, he didn't really feel all that dead in the dream she just had. Oh, no. In fact, he rarely had the energy required to perform as well as he just did when he was alive, no thanks to Azkaban. Nathalie put a hand against her forehead and tried to calm down, even as the tremors subsided. Fuck, but that was a good dream.

The sound of something falling from a dresser to the carpet echoed out of the darkened room. What was that?

There was a small noise coming from her closet. Something was moving, and whatever it was, it was far too noisy to be a house elf. Nathalie pulled a small caliber pistol out of her bedside stand and took steady aim. She also began to focus her anger so that her change would come quickly should she have need of it.

"Come out!" She snarled. "Come out now damn you!"

In one corner of the closet, through the half open door, the overexcited and panicky Veela noticed a soft white-ish glow build. Then, the light began to build and come forward.

Nathalie's eyes shot wide open and her jaw fell loosely. The source of those phantom noises floated out of her closet, jumped up onto the foot of her bed and began to lick itself.

"Sirius?" Nathalie squeaked.

The softly glowing spectral canine lifted it's shaggy head out from between it's legs, looked at her and barked happily.

End Chapter

Chapter Notes:

Nothing to see here, citizen. Please move along.

Chapter Nineteen: Morning Star

The next day was unseasonably cold. Cold enough that it wouldn't matter if a certain little angel happened to go on a trip to a Veela temple, since it was cold there too, right? Okay, that excuse didn't work even for Gabby and she was the one that thought it up, but Harry could come up with a better one, right?

Gabby was all for going back to the temple that day and not a moment later. She had Harry back. She had angels to talk to. She didn't want to wait long enough that the grown-ups would make her wait until school was out again. Waiting through a whole school week would take forever.

"Surely this can wait." Her Momma replied. "Fleur, Segolene and Marion would be heading back in a week's time. The temple is a very long way away. It's a big trip."

"Not for me, it isn't." Gabrielle plead her case, Harry by her side. "I get my wings out, I go -Bonnnngg- and I'm there!"

"I understand your worries, Auntie." Harry added. "I would rather wait for everyone to be ready before going myself but with what we've learned over Christmas, I'm not sure waiting until a larger support staff is ready to meet us there is a good idea."

"And what makes you think that you are a better archeologist or curse breaker than Marion, Harry?" Apolline held the ghost's gaze. "And what if you take her right into a blizzard? Even if the weather had been poor last time, we would have at least had safety in numbers."

Harry smiled. Gabby liked it when Harry smiled.

"The weather won't even be an issue. So long as we- er, you all wear the proper clothing and bring flashlights or lanterns, I can have Angel drop us right in the middle of that treasure room!"

Momma was being quiet. This was a good sign, Gabby thought. Momma was running out of things to say no with.

"We zip in and Angel and I go right to this back wall thing. You and Fleur can look around while we're gone or whatever and as soon as we come out of the wall, the four of us come home again."

"I would rather we come into the entry vestibule. Right in front of the Veela guard statues." Apolline countered. "We don't know if that door can be opened from the inside and Fleur and I may need to leave the the old fashioned way while you two are otherwise occupied."

Gabby tried not to giggle. There were no toilets inside the temple.

"Fair enough. You know I'll do everything within my power to keep her safe of course- and really... how could Gabby or you or any of your line be at risk where we're going? It's built for you. It's dedicated to her. With the wizard magic barrier, the hidden entrance and the bloody great guardian statues, that temple is probably safer for Gabby than her own bedroom."

Apolline held one hand up to her forehead like she was warding away a headache.

"Very well..." YESSSSssssss, "but you get to tell your father what it is you want to do today young lady... and we have to eat something first."

"Yes Mamma." "Yes Auntie."

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On an island in the middle of a frozen lake, in the front room of a temple that lay undisturbed for centuries until just a few days ago, a light appeared in thin air. As the blue-white light shifted and moved, shadows danced about the room with a view of a snow covered frozen lake between the abandoned temple and it's similarly abandoned city. Moments later, Fleur and Apolline pulled away from Gabrielle and her wings came back up to form a second halo. The first faded as soon as it touched the ground.

Inside Gabrielle, Harry marveled at the winter scene around him. Gabby hadn't even turned to look at the interior guardians yet and already he felt a sense of wonder a simply being there.

Yeah. Gabrielle cooed. It really is pretty.

Behind Gabby, there was a harsh squawk and a flash of orange light. Momma wasted no time changing and was already opening the door with summoned Veela fire. That was something the little girl was quite happy to miss, as she never liked seeing Momma get all scary. When the sound of stone grinding on stone reached Gabby's ears, she turned around.

Gabby felt Harry's excitement grow upon seeing the gold clad stone guardians flanking the doorway. And why not? They were pretty cool.

As Gabby watched, her mother changed back to normal. She fixed her shirt and put on a coat now that her shirts wing slits were letting in the cold. Momma and Fleur both messed with a pair of gas lamps until they were hissing and glowing brightly. Gabby herself stayed in her angel body. It was warmer and it was fun and it came with its own flashlight.

"Ready, Little Angel?" Momma asked.

Gabby nodded. She would always be ready to come here. Ready to talk to Gabriel. Ready to talk to more angels.

Once again, the inner chamber was lit by artificial means. Light bounced off of gold and silver, silk and stone as the soft hiss of two gas lanterns and the low buzz of a halo disturbed the peace.

The high trill of angel giggles filled the room.

"What is so funny, Little Angel?" Momma called back to her youngest.

It's Harry, Momma! Gabby called. He's humming adventure music in my head and he wants to look for secret levers and hidden doors!

"Then tell him to go to the back wall." Fleur replied. "You're hidden room is over there."

You don't think there are any pitfalls or poison arrow traps in here do you? Gabby called to no-one in particular.

Momma and Fleur looked at each other nervously before paying more attention to the floor beneath them. It didn't look like it was going to swallow them whole.

Gabby did make it all the way to the back, but not before slowly looking over just about everything in the room. Sure, she was on a mission, but this stuff was just so pretty- and there was so much of it! Harry was also too distracted to push Gabby any faster. Momma and Fleur were no better, as this was the ultimate window shopping trip. You could not buy these treasures in Paris or Milan or New York at any price.

Hey there cutie! Angel Gabrielle waved to the angel statue on its knees. It didn't wave back. It just stayed there looking all worshipful at the back wall. Drat.

Finally, Gabby stood before the fake portal at the back wall. Her gaze swept over the wing and halo pattern etched in stone, giving her little flashbacks to what happened the first time she stared hard at the halo. That part of the last trip was kind of fun actually. Warm. It made her feel so loved.

Just as it was doing again this time. The faintly glowing halo flared with white-gold light just as it had before. There were gasps behind her, but Gabby didn't pay any more attention this time than last time. There was, however, one difference from last time; Gabby was already an angel with halo fully formed.

Countless lines of runes ancient text in the form of runes and pictographs quickly lit up the wall, casting a warm orange glow across the rest of the room. The wall itself began to ripple as if made of liquid.

"You're right," Momma muttered to Fleur while Gabby was preoccupied. "It does remind me of a pensieve."

Gabby was about to step through the wall again, but snapped out of it at the last moment. Bye, Momma. Bye, Fleur. Love you see you later!

And with a quickly waved hand, she hopped through the wall.

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Hermione sighed and set her quill down.

Looking around the room she shared with Luna while staying with the Delacours, she had to stifle a laugh. The old maison-forte was traditional... very traditional... but not completely out of date with the muggle world. There was a whole room on one of the lower floors dedicated to modern electrical devices, but the modernization didn't stop there. The kitchens had up to date gas appliances and the icebox looked modern even if it was run off of wardstones. Still, the point was that mechanical devices had no trouble operating in any room in the home so long as there were no unshielded electronics involved.

So why was Hermione still writing with a quill? Habit. Four years at Hogwarts left her feeling oddly empty if she set herself down to write an essay and didn't pick up a long feathery quill in order to further refine her calligraphy skills. Her S's always lacked that special something, no matter how often she practiced.

But now her wrist ached. Transcribing Lily Potter's notes on blood magic (repetition aids memorization) was a painful lesson in runic and arithmantic calligraphy that made the young witch wonder if this was what arthritis would feel like when it inevitably struck some (hopefully many) decades down the line. Or did wizards have a potion for arthritis?

Maybe she should have just used a biro like Lily did...

As Hermione rubbed her right wrist with her left hand, her gaze drifted onto the letter given her by the Gringotts representative. He told her it wasn't time sensitive, but she didn't have any other pressing business that could be done without the aid of her right hand.

"What do you think, Hedwig?" Hermione asked the beautiful white bird standing on a perch by the bedroom window. "Should I open this?"

"Bark!" Came the one syllable avian reply.

Hermione scrunched up her brow in concentration. "I know I'm not as good at reading you as Harry was, but I think you either said 'yes, open the letter' or 'where is bacon?'"

"Bark, hoot!"

"You're right, Hedwig. I think I shall open the letter... and I'll have Zoé get you some bacon too."

With a quick swipe of one of her fingernails, the seal was broken and the parchment unfolded.

"Right. Looks like someone had help putting this together." Hermione murmured. Sure, Sirius was a pureblood wizard, but he was not all that responsible nor did he seem the type to write in legalese.

"Thank you, Sirius, you didn't have too..." Apparently he'd bequeathed her something of fair value. "I would have been fine with Nathalie getting it all, you know..."

Hermione's face began to redden.

"Dear God, please don't tell me Luna was right about you, Sirius... how could we even... I mean he's a ghost and..."

Shifting uncomfortably in her seat, Hermione turned her eyes away from Lord Black's last private message to his 'second favorite' muggleborn witch. Torn between walking away from the rather... intimate... last requests and her own desire to know if his suggestions would really work, she started reading again.

"One day, Sirius Black. One day I will get you for this." She swore in embarrassment and indignation, but that didn't stop her from reading. It was a weakness, she knew, to need to finish reading anything she started. Apparently, Sirius knew it too.

A prankster to the very end.

-o\0/o-

Harry! An ecstatic ball of white feathers slammed into his chest. I love you, Harry!

"I... love... you too, Angel." Wait just a tic. He had a chest to be slammed into... and Gabby wasn't asleep. Where the bloody hell was he anyways?

Harry didn't know it yet, but Gabby had been here before. He took in the rock they were standing on, the creek beneath the rock, and the forest glen through which the creek passed.

Yes! The stars are out this time too! The feathery monster around Harry's waist let go and began to prance around her own private stage, slipping back into her normal silver-blond form as she twirled about.

Harry looked up. Merlin, that was a lot of stars. Not even Astronomy class had shown him as many, though to be fair, Professor Sinistra had to deal with clouds and such as were common in Scotland. And the night air was perfect here... just a bit of a fresh breeze with a hint of spring flowers. It was too good to be real.

Hold on, it was too good to be real. Harry checked his pulse.

No pulse. Damn.

"Ah, Gabrielle. I am very pleased to see you return." Harry spun in place to face this new voice. This very sweet and soft new voice. "And you must be Lord Potter."

She was beautiful. Of course she was... this is where one goes to meet angels in the middle of a Veela temple. Aside from being beautiful, she had long brown hair falling in ringlets down to her waist. Harry saw that her eyes seemed to be a warm brown... they almost seemed back-lit as he could clearly see her eye color in spite of the oddly soft light given off by a fair sized moon and a more than full complement of stars.

"Harry! That's Gabriel! Hi Gabriel! That's My Harry! Isn't he great? I think he's great." Gabby hopped back over to Harry and gave him another big hug around the waist such that she could smile at Gabriel at the same time. "I wish we could take Gabriel home with us, Harry. She's really nice."

"Good- er... evening?" Harry looked up to the sky above. "Is it evening here?"

"It is whatever time you wish it to be, Lord Potter. You need only ask young Gabrielle to change things if our environment is not to your liking."

Harry felt his Angel nod into his chest.

"Please, none of that 'Lord' business."

"As you wish, Harry." Gabriel smiled and Harry could see peace and serenity radiate from that smile. He didn't think it was a thrall, but he felt loads better. Actually, the same thing happened with Gabby only more so. Was it because they were both angels?

Harry knelt down next to his Angel. "Is that true, Gabby? Can you change things here like I can in your dreams?"

Gabby looked down at her feet and nodded. "I like the stars though. They're very pretty."

Harry looked up at the sky. She was right. It would be hard to beat the sky already in place with anything else. "I like the stars too, Gabby. You don't have to change them if you don't want to."

"So... Gabriel... lovely place you have here. Do you mind my asking where this is?" Harry stood back up as Gabby went to give Gabriel a hug. For a moment, Harry thought he saw a little arc of golden light pass through Gabriel's eyes.

The older angel returned Gabby's hug as if they were long lost family. "You may ask any question at all, Harry. The fact that this little sweetheart thinks so well of you is enough for me. She would not love one who was not worthy of my respect."

Harry blushed. Here was someone right out of the Bible treating him like he was some sort of equal or something. Well, he thought she was from church stories. Vernon never really let Harry read a copy of the Dursley family Bible. Said it would be forever stained and that Harry's filthy hands would burn at the slightest contact. Still, he's heard others talk about this Gabriel as if she were someone kind of important.

"This is not my place so much as it belongs to the Veela who's temple houses it and to the angels who visit whenever they have need." Gabriel looked down at Gabby. "Like this little one. I dare say she needs our assistance more than any of her sisters who visited before."

"How so?" Harry asked.

"I cannot say for sure if young Gabrielle is the only angel alive today, but I can say that she has met none outside of this temple. Without an older angel to help her... and her Lord... this temple is the only way she may learn of our history... our purpose... and by extension her own purpose."

Gabby was listening, but only just a bit. Gabriel was saying things she didn't quite follow, which meant it was time to see if the creek water tasted as good as it looked.

"As for your earlier question..." Ah, Harry had already forgotten that there was an earlier question. Did Gabby even have those sheets of questions Régine and Hermione were working on? "You mentioned your own ability to change Gabrielle's dreams, and that is close to the mark. We are in a magical construct, a dream if you will, encased and controlled by magic. I myself am part of that dream, however real I may appear to you. Though it was an uncommon skill within your predecessors, entering the dreams of their angels was not unheard of. Any of my sisters here may alter our setting as she desires though Gabrielle may overrule any of us and you as her Lord has the final say."

"Sisters?" Aside from the one he came in with, Harry's only seen one angel in here so far.

"Yes, sisters. We felt it best that only I welcome you to begin with as not to overwhelm you. Gabrielle knows you do not like to be the focus of large crowds and we know what she knows."

"Anyone I might know? I mean, I'm not well read on angels in spite of Hermione's attempts to stuff me full of knowledge, but I might know one or two of them." Harry asked.

Gabriel's smile began to show teeth. "Perhaps you know this one?"

Harry's eyebrows rose as a petite silver-blond haired girl with perfect crystal blue eyes peeked out from behind Gabriel. He looked down into the stream to make sure... yeah, still there.

"You made a copy of Gabrielle?" He asked. Twin-Gabby giggled. That caught the attention of her original.

"Wow! You're me! Wanna play?" Gabrielle with wet boots called up to herself.

"Ooo-kayyyyy!" Her clone shouted before the two began a very well matched game of tag.

Gabriel sighed in contentment at seeing two nine year old twin girls zipping about the glen. "A copy of every angel that ever visited resides in this place that we now call home. The Veela once called this place the Hall of Angels."

"Wow. How many angels is that? Who made your hall in the first place?"

For the first time, Gabriel seemed to lose some of her cheer. The sheer wrongness of seeing her this way would have caused Harry to lose his breath, had he needed any to begin with.

"I should like to call in our twins, if you please. Gabrielle must learn the answer to this question, as it is arguably the single most important question you could ask."

Harry calmed himself and turned to the girls. Before he could call for them, a soft hand covered his. There was the slightest shock of static electricity before Harry looked back at the angel who stopped him.

"Now is as good a time as any to help you strengthen the bond between you and Gabrielle." She said. "In truth, you did something similar already. In Hogsmeade."

"You mean when I called her?"

"She was very far away and yet she responded immediately to your command. More to the point, she did not hear your call. She felt it

deep inside." Gabriel's hand moved to cover Harry's heart. "To call Gabrielle to your side no matter where she is or what she is doing, focus your call inward. If you do so, not even the people around you will know you summoned her until she appears in a circle of light... or at a full sprint if she is close enough to do so."

Harry turned back to the two girls who were by now halfway to the opposite tree line. He couldn't see them, only hear them. Harry closed his eyes, focused on his Angel and called.

There was an oddly melodious twin squeal of "I'm coming!" and then the sound of broken twigs and crushed leaves began to build as four small feet made their best speed to Harry.

As soon as the two Gabby's stopped in front of him, the both looked up with the same post-sprint pant and the same look of adoration. Due to Harry's connection with his angel, he instantly knew which was which.

"Gabby..." Harry drawled to the original.

"Yes, Harry?"

He looked over to her twin, her copy, and froze. She's Gabby too-but then at the same time, she isn't.

"It's okay, Harry." The twin called softly. "I know I'm not really her."

He caught her eyes with his. She may be a copy, but she was as close to the real thing as this world could make; and if the real Gabby so much as suspected Harry didn't really love her...

Harry knelt down before the Gabby that spoke out and pulled her into a deep hug, one that the real Gabby immediately joined from the outside.

"You see?" Gabby squeaked. "Harry's the best! He loves me and you're me so he loves you too! Isn't that right, Harry?"

Harry nodded into his second angel's shoulder as his first angel bounced on her toes. A single tear dripped onto Harry's cheek.

And then his second angel changed. Soft white wings wrapped around Harry as he once more let a young girl into his heart after (technically) only having known her for a few minutes. The original Gabby took this as her cue to change as well and Harry was hard pressed not to lose himself in two very effective angelic thralls. It would seem that, in this place at least, the copy of an angel could do anything the real one could. Harry began to feel guilty that he wouldn't be able to take Gabby's twin out of the room with them when they left.

Luckily, a scattering of applause, giggles and the occasional cat-call broke him out of that rut. Harry pulled free of the Gabby's only to find that they now had an audience. A rather large audience, and they moved to someplace different when he wasn't looking. Row upon row of beautiful young- or young looking- women filled the seats of an old rock-hewn amphitheater set into the side of a hill. Hundreds of them. Dozens were transformed and had their halo's hovering gently overhead. Gold. Silver. White. Blue. Many halo's seemed to mix those four colors in some way, but no other color was represented that he could see. Harry couldn't begin to count how many angels were looking... at... him. Wow. Uh... Harry wouldn't say it was a bad kind of focus like what he frequently received in the Great Hall of Hogwarts, but the weird factor was as high as it could get.

The stars were still shining brightly above but the creek was missing. Harry, the Gabby's and Gabriel were standing center stage. As Harry turned to face the crowd, Gabby grabbed one of his hands. Her twin grabbed his other hand. Gabriel continued to shape things as she was the most senior angel standing by Harry and neither Harry nor Gabrielle were inclined to assume control.

"Harry, meet my sisters." Gabriel called softly.

Harry held his right hand up in a clumsy attempt to wave at his audience. The angels seemed to take it in stride, as many waved back and some called out 'Hi, Harry!' or something close to it. There were many languages involved. Harry got the feeling that he was participating in some ancient history themed game show on the telly.

"There are many things that you and Gabrielle need to learn about us. You might think Gabrielle is the one who needs these lessons, but in truth you need to learn our history as much as she does,

Harry." Gabriel started, and many angels in the crowd nodded along as if it were an accepted fact. "It will take time. It will take a lot of time, and both of you will return to us more times than you can count... but some lessons need to be learned before others."

"Such as the difference between Angels and Veela." Gabby's magical twin near whispered from Harry's side. Due to the pure magical nature of this place, everyone still heard her.

"And this is not my story to tell." Gabriel said startling Harry a bit. He was growing used to having the brown haired angel in charge of things.

In the lower seats, somewhat near the front. A small group of angels began moving. One with hair like liquid gold whispered into her white-blond neighbor's ear while holding her hand. "We still love you."

"I know." The white-blond responded before kissing her bench mate's cheek and getting up.

This new angel approaching Harry seemed just a bit different than the others. Though now that he thought about it, there was a line of angels in the row she came from that all had the same off vibe about them. Now that he looked closer, she was every bit as breathtaking as any of the other angels here. Hard as it was to believe, she was more beautiful by far than any of the Veela Nathalie employed, and that was saying something. This one, aside from her white-blond hair, had a very deep tan and eyes that seemed to be lavender in color... but that couldn't be right, could it? She was also one of the handful who seemed to look about Fleur's age or perhaps Nathalie's when nearly all of the other angels had the apparent age of Madame Mitterand; by non-magical standards, most angels looked just old enough to have a child Gabby's age, but not old enough to have a child Fleur's age. In contrast to this one angel's apparent age, her robes looked older... more ancient... than anything any of the others were wearing, again save for the few in her row.

Lavender (until Harry could get her name) stepped up to the center of the stage and introduced herself. "Hello Harry." She called in English. "I was made in the likeness of Lucifer."

If Harry's heart were in the habit of beating, it would have just stopped in shock. Lucifer sighed. His reaction was expected. Disappointing, but expected.

"Chamber of Secrets, Harry." Lucifer added softly.

Oh. Oh! Harry glanced around only to find that not a one of the angels present seemed upset that Lucifer was among them. Then he remembered what that other angel whispered to her, 'We still love you.'

"Hello Lucifer." Harry stepped up and offered her his hand. Seemingly pleased at his recovery, Lucifer shook it. "I must say, you don't look like the ruler of Hell to me and I bet you never met any of those people Uncle Vernon insisted were 'in league' with you."

Lucifer snorted and rolled her eyes. Interesting. Harry should have expected that not all mature angels were as calm and collected as Gabriel.

"So the fourth Triwizard Champion understands after all."

"Not yet..." Harry replied. "But I hope to."

"Where to start then..." Lucifer collected herself by running her fingers through Gabrielle's hair. "There was a time, back when Mankind was still in its infancy, that my Lord came to me and bade me do His will. He commanded that we, His servants, devise seven artifacts through which we could observe and influence the mortal world. It was foretold by one of my sisters that these great works would one day be key to the evolution of Man. I was tasked to preserve the history of my angelic sisters so that those who come after us may learn from our experience. While there were Lords before ours and Angels before us, none previously had constructed such a repository of angelic knowledge. I worked without rest from the time He did command me until my task was done, and in time I devised a magic of rare power- you would understand it as a ward- that once cast could be used for the storing of knowledge and for teaching. I created this, the Hall of Angels, where you are now."

"You created the Veela temple?" Harry asked.

Lucifer shook her head. "You entered this place from the Veela temple, but the ward is set into the rear wall and need not have a temple around it save for security. Of the original artifacts, each required seven angels to devote themselves to their creation for seven days each; I and six of my sisters-

At this, Lucifer looked back into the amphitheater seating to the angels in her row. The ones that looked younger... different... Ah. There were six of them.

"I and six of my sisters created the first six artifacts without fail. We were working on the seventh artifact on the seventh and final day when we became fallen angels." Lucifer spoke like an accident victim, one who already recounted the ordeal one too many times for her own liking.

"Fallen?"

"I was my Lord's first angel and I was His most prized and powerful servant. I had the greatest magical lore to work with though my six chosen sisters were not far behind me. Our acts of creation were great and our Lord was well pleased with our progress. What I did not know was that powerful beings sought to seize my Lord's possessions, to twist their purpose, and to weaken my Lord by destroying that which He held most dear."

"You. He held you most dear." Harry quickly found a little angel wrapped desperately around his waist. Then there were two of them. He held on tightly.

Lucifer nodded. "We were at our most vulnerable, at the most delicate step in the process, when the vile creatures broke cover and overpowered us. They took our sacrifice of blood which was to empower the gate and corrupted it. The blood I and my sisters gave willingly was spoiled and mixed with blood spilled under pain of torture. The gate was opened, but its true purpose was never realized. It now leads to a pit, a place of darkness and dust. You may leave this hall when you so choose, but the seventh artifact is now a gate that only allows passage one way... from the light of the world into the black hole of despair."

A slender hand came down on Lucifer's right shoulder. The one from before, the angel with hair of gold.

"Michael." Lucifer whispered.

"Let me finish the tale." Michael offered and Lucifer reluctantly accepted her offer.

Harry used the short interlude to comfort the two tiny angels that were quivering in fear. Gabby was terrified. "I won't let anyone take you from me, Gabby. Never ever." He whispered into little ears.

When next Harry looked to Michael, he saw in her eyes two pools of boiling fire as bright as the sun.

"I came to my sister's aid," said Michael, "as did Gabriel and many others. My Lord's wrath was great that day. We slew our enemies, and those we did not slay were cast into the pit as they intended for us."

"They didn't..." Harry couldn't ask if Lucifer and her sisters were cast into the pit and lost forever.

"No." The angel of gold and fire replied. "Lucifer we saved from that fate, but in a last act of defiance, one amongst the enemy ranks cast magic so foul to us that we singled out its practitioners for destruction from that day forward. The magic entered my weakened sisters, tore at their blood and removed the chain which anchored them to our Lord."

"I'm sorry, but what chain?" Harry asked.

Gabriel picked up the explanation from behind him.

"The chain that binds an Angel to her Lord. The links are of blood, forged in love and magic. A chain binds Gabrielle to you Harry."

"Too be honest, that sounds a bit like magical slavery to me. That's not really the case, is it?" Harry was beginning to think that maybe Hermione didn't need to know how he and Gabby were connected. She might get a little preachy.

"Gabrielle is no slave, Harry, save perhaps to her heart." The brunette angel smiled warmly down at the two angels still tightly wrapped around Harry's waist. "She will carry out your will because

she wants to, because you fill her heart with joy. Gabrielle can refuse you without any form of penalty such as you may imagine blood bonds require; Her only penalty comes from herself for not wanting to fail you. It would break her heart."

"I swear I'll never demand anything of her that she would not have agreed to do anyway. I love her as much as she loves me and to see her in pain would break my heart." Harry announced firmly.

"And this is why Gabrielle is bound to you as your angel. This is why the two of you did not pass on to the next level of existence."

"I know I'm not the best educated ghost wizard you're likely to meet, but I'm still not clear on why that works." To be fair, few wizards alive or dead could ever truly claim to understand this lesson.

"With your permission Harry, I should like to continue where Lucifer left off." Harry looked up to find that the white-blond angel was back amongst her closest sisters. The fallen.

"The chain between Angel and Lord is a bond of immense strength. It grants the angel powers which you and Gabrielle have only begun to explore. It also gives her joy and love far beyond that which any other will ever experience save her sister angels. So long as she is bound to you, she will be immortal. The bond also benefits the Lord. Aside from the feelings and knowledge the two of you may share and commanding Gabrielle to do your will, you also gain immortality."

Harry tilted his head before checking to a pulse again. No. Still nothing. "No offense, but I think you got that bit wrong. I'm pretty sure I'm dead and not immortal."

"If certain steps are taken, this is a problem that can be resolved."

"Really?" Harry really perked up at that.

Gabriel held her hands out in a soft warding gesture. "I humbly request that we save such things for another day, Lord Potter. Knowing how to return to life will not hasten such a return and our current lesson must come before all others."

Once again, the patience of the dead helped Harry do the right thing. He agreed.

"As wonderful as the bond was for Angel and Lord alike, having the chain broken was beyond horrible. As the chain anchors the Lord to his Angel and binds her soul to his, unseating that chain harms both body and soul in ways that cannot ever be repaired. Our fallen sisters no longer felt their Lord within their hearts. They could appear bodily before Him, and He loved them still, but their hearts were forever damaged and their once pure souls violated. It became too painful for Lucifer to even be in our Lord's presence. She and her fellow fallen left us, and we wept for the loss of our sisters.

"As the counting of days lengthened in their self imposed exile, the fallen would learn that the immortality they enjoyed as servants and messengers of their Lord had left them. They began to age as mortals do. Their hearts filled with misery, jealousy and a host of other dark feelings that had never visited them before. Their powers were greatly reduced; fire was still theirs to command and they could summon wings with which to fly, but only when their hearts were ruled by anger. They could still sway the will of the common man, but only with desire and not the love and joy that their presence commanded before. At first the seven sisters thought that they were lucky to retain much of their physical beauty. This beauty soon came to be seen as a curse when the sisters were set upon by bandits one night as they lay sleeping. In the ensuing battle between armed men and fire wielding women, one sister was put to the sword for her resistance and two were taken away to be sold into slavery. Four escaped to one day make a life for themselves in the world of man. In time the six living sisters came to bear children... daughters, every one... and thus they founded a new race in the world. A race founded on the blood of angels tainted by the darkness of the world around them."

It took Harry a minute of holding Gabby and her magical twin close to him to realize that Gabriel was silent again. It took him another minute to realize what it was that she said.

"Are you saying that fallen angels became Veela? That angels walked the Earth first?" Harry suspected something similar, but could never figure out which of the two came first. He thought that angels were a final evolutionary step for Veela. It helped that Harry

had overheard Fleur and Hermione arguing that very point on two separate occasions.

"The seven sisters, though lost to us, were always angels. Even unto death. The daughters of the six who lived long enough to have children, however... they were the world's first Veela."

"And this school, this hall of angels? It's in the middle of a Veela temple, you know. An abandoned one at that." Harry prompted.

"After the seven were all laid to rest, we revealed ourselves to their daughters and grand-daughters. Those born into slavery were freed and we cared for them all as favored children whenever our Lord permitted. As these were the daughters and grand-daughters of his beloved lost angels, he gave us leave to dote on them as we pleased. For a time, the Veela race were given boons which, though not returning what was once lost, did give them greater sway in the world than their few numbers could account for. In exchange for our patronage, the daughters of the seven began to worship us directly. We continued to serve our Lord and yet the Veela took us for their pantheon.

"It was only in these last two thousand years of history as you know it that we angels began to leave this world. Our Lord knew his time in this world had finally come to an end. Some of us were left to perform specific tasks, such as Michael with your friend Jeanne. I was left as well, though I am not permitted to speak of my tasks be they complete or no. For the daughters of the seven, the world once again became hostile when their patrons stopped visiting and granting boons. Veela soon developed bitter rivalries with heads of state who sought to control their wealth and influence. Their ability to control kingdoms where women were second class citizens or worse faded away to nothing. They came to be hunted down, alone or in groups, for their powers and for their beauty. Gabrielle's ancestors finally had to abandon their temple completely when both the Catholic Church and the International Confederation of Wizards chose to hunt them to near extinction between three and four hundred years ago."

"And now, after centuries of silence, we show up." Harry concluded.

"A new angel and her new Lord. We are pledged to aid you in any way we can; Gabrielle has already been accepted as one of us." At

that point, Harry lost one of his hangers on when Gabby's twin skipped over to hug Gabriel instead.

"I like it here. These girls are nice girls." She said as she waived to her original.

"Can we talk about that too? Gabby and me, that is? I'd like to know what I did to Gabrielle and why it doesn't happen more often. Are there any other new angels out there?"

"You anchored your soul to Gabrielle quite by accident, but the two of you are tightly bound nonetheless. You are tied to her with your blood, your love and your magic. You are her Lord due in part to circumstance and fate but also due to your selfless nature. You are worthy of being her Lord. Sadly, those who are worthy of binding angels to them, those who know self-sacrifice, are more rare even than the Veela they may bind. Gabrielle was born with the same potential to become an angel as any Veela. At birth, every infant Veela is pure of body, pure of soul and receptive to the binding should a worthy Lord seek to bind her. A Veela child may grow spoiled or selfish, but this is no impediment to the binding and will soon wither in the face of her Lord's love and affection. Young Veela only lose the ability to accept a bond when puberty finds them still unbound. It is no accident that Gabrielle's family was expecting their 'Little Angel' to throw a foul tantrum upon her first change and also why they thought she was a year 'early'."

"Because I already, er... bound myself to her? I changed her?" Harry was doing his best to follow Gabriel's explanation. It wasn't that complicated compared to some magical theory he'd read, just a lot to take in all at once.

"Yes. The chain between the two of you was forged on the day of the Second Task. Gabrielle's soul accepted the link immediately. Her body woke up to its new destiny over the next few months. That summer, an angel was born to this Earth for the first time in a very, very long time. To be more specific, she is the first angel born of Veela ancestry. Truly unique in all of Creation."

"So there aren't likely to be any more angels then. Pity. Gabrielle shouldn't have to go through this alone." Harry mumbled.

"I won't be alone, Harry." Gabby looked up to him and smiled. "I'll have you. I'll always have you."

"Yes you will, Gabby. Always." Harry turned to his Angel and returned her smile.

Harry looked away from Gabby again when a polite cough interrupted. Lucifer was back. The pre-fallen angel with lavender eyes ignored Harry and knelt before Gabby.

"Hi there, kid." Lucifer called.

"Hi." Gabby waved her hand.

"I was my Lord's first, just like you."

Gabby's eyes lit up. "Really? Can we be friends?"

"Absolutely. I've got a lot to teach you too. We'll be the very best of friends."

"Okay!" Gabby began to bounce up and down on the balls of her feet.

"Say, Gabby..." Lucifer put her hand to her chin as though she were deep in thought. "How many Veela are there your age? Do you know?"

Gabby looked like she liked the attention, but didn't know the answer.

"More than ten, you think?" Lucifer prompted.

Gabby nodded quickly.

"Maybe even more than a hundred? From babies to ten year old's?"

Gabby waited a bit longer, but she nodded to that one too. "Maybe."

Lucifer didn't stand up, but she did look up to meet Harry's curious gaze.

"We know you're worthy, Harry. If you're really serious about Gabby not going through this alone, then you could do something about it

yourself. You were willing to sacrifice yourself for Gabrielle. You can do the same for other Veela too."

In spite of the fact that he was dead, Harry felt the need to adjust his shirt collar.

"I- ummm... I thought we already went over this whole 'I'm dead' thing."

Lucifer grinned, and her grin showed a lot of teeth. "Like Gabriel said, Lord Potter. Give us some time and we can help you resolve that problem. Your sacrifice was noble and did save our Little Angel in Black Lake, but for future reference being willing to sacrifice yourself is enough. Under more controlled conditions, you need not die to bind a second angel to you... or a third..."

Harry actually took a step back. Strange as it may seem, he felt like Lucifer was asking him to give her children.

"Are we absolutely sure you're one of the good guys?" Harry asked the grinning angel.

Gabriel managed to maintain her calm, though her cheeks may have flushed a bit and her eyes were sparkling furiously.

"Gabby. I think we should check up on your mum. What do you think?"

End Chapter

Chapter Notes:

I went in to this telling myself that I would not write a story in the Veela Bond genre. And then I decided Gabby would be an angel. And then I worked through what it meant for her to be an angel. Now, after looking back over things, I'm going to have to say that this probably qualifies as a Veela Bond story even if I am changing what the bond is supposed to do and how is supposed to work.

God ain't struck me down yet, so I figure He (She/ They if in fact there are any) don't plan to in revenge for using archangels as characters in my story.

All angels are female in my story, just in case you didn't notice. I have a explanation for that and one day I might actually use it in the story.

With respect to named angels: My description of Gabriel is somewhat based on historical art depicting the archangel. Michael was influenced somewhat by archangel's post as the commander of God's army (fierce/noble equals golden/fiery maybe?). Lucifer's description comes from the manga Oh! My Goddess. In that story, Hild (who takes the Lucifer/fallen angel character position) is the Queen of Hell, the ex-wife of the All-Father, and an alpha level hottie with white-blonde hair, a deep tan and lavender eyes.

I do not expect the seventh artifact, the gate to the pit, to become a factor in this story, but I do see it as 'currently' residing in the Department of Mysteries. It's in the Death Chamber to be precise. Good thing Sirius didn't get pushed through it, huh?

Chapter Twenty: The River Styx

December 28th, 1995

Fleur almost dropped the ankh in her hands, perhaps the oldest gold artifact she'd ever touched, when she heard noise coming from the Veela temple's back wall.

Momma! Fleur! We're done! The little angel trilled upon re-entering the treasure room. I'm hungry.

Fleur carefully placed the priceless Egyptian treasure back down and walked over to her sister.

"Welcome back, Little Angel. How was your visit?" Fleur prompted.

Behind her, Apolline stepped on a cigarette butt near the guardian statues and came back inside.

Harry slipped out of Gabby, though the feathery girl did not transform back immediately.

"Wow." Harry said, and Gabby nodded in agreement behind him. "I'm not really sure what I was expecting, but that was brilliant."

I wish we could come back every day. Gabby chirped. I wish all school was like angel school. That was fun!

"I'm glad to hear that, although..." Apolline spoke up as she moved closer to her girls, "...next time you go to 'angel school', you really must take your assignments with you."

By the end of her statement, Apolline had a loose stack of parchments and sheets of paper in hand. It was the 'official' list of questions Harry and Gabby were supposed to ask about. Gabby forgot to take them with her.

"Oh." Harry blinked in realization. "Right."

-o\0/o-

Diagon Alley was practically empty.

As the lunchtime came and went, an unnatural silence continued to fill the alley. Not even the boots of ICW aurors marching up and down the alley made any sound. To be fair, silencing charms were a requirement in times of open conflict.

A bit of French could be heard echoing off the walls just outside of the gateway near the Leaky Cauldron. If one listened very closely, random noise from the muggle world one block over could be heard. It wasn't that the alley's airborne noise pollution charms were failing but that some sound traveled as vibrations through the buildings and street.

This rare peace was disturbed when the boot of one Spanish volunteer splashed into a poorly placed puddle. The wizard frowned and looked down as he continued on, only just sparing enough attention to prove that he had in fact soiled his boot in the only puddle on the block. His four teammates chuckled at his misfortune. He cursed and pointed his wand at his boot, ready to remove the filth.

That's when things got interesting.

-pop-

Five Spanish aurors all tensed at the unexpected arrival of a dual apparition. By the time five wands were up and ready to release a barrage of combat magic, both new arrivals had already fallen to the cobblestones at their feet. One of the new arrivals, a witch, began to scream.

"Healer... we need a healer!" The auror in charge yelled out as he and his men encircled the two fallen magicals. The squad leader and two of his men both began running diagnostic scans on the screaming witch and the man who came in with her. The two remaining aurors kept alert should new arrivals chose to apparate or portkey in using these two as a distraction.

In the background, a once pleasant conversation in French was replaced by loud shouting. Orders were being given. Healers were coming.

"She splinched!" One man called as the screaming woman tried to hold out her missing hand for help. It was a clean splinch and not at

all like the bleeding purple gash which drew a diagonal line across her face.

Healers arrived on scene but they were already too late for the woman's older wizard companion. A blood-to-wine curse ended him even before his feet touched the cobblestone alley.

As the field healers readied their living patient to be taken away, the auror with a wet boot turned to look over the notice that his group, among many others, had just spent much of the morning distributing to the better known wizarding areas within Britain.

CITIZENS OF MAGICAL BRITAIN

A state of emergency has been declared covering all magicals living within the British Isles by order of the High Council of the International Confederation of Wizards. On December 24th, your local government was destabilized during activities in the Village of Hogsmeade. As a result of this action, a group of dark wizards took control of the Ministry of Magic building in London.

Do not attempt to do business in the Ministry of Magic building. Do not attempt to use the public floo network for any reason. There are reports of floo travel being redirected for dark purposes. It is strongly advised that you block all floo connections in your home and workplaces to prevent unauthorized access.

Please stay in your homes. International aurors and professionals from ICW member nations have come to Britain to help restore peace and order to your land. At this time, The Leaky Cauldron and Hogwarts Castle are designated safe shelters should you feel endangered. ICW aurors currently hold Diagon alley, all satellite alleys, St. Mungo's Hospital and have a strong presence in Hogsmeade Valley and Tinworth.

If you or a family member need assistance, please make contact by owl post or house elf before running the risk of venturing out in person. If you have reason to believe that a child or bed ridden relative has been left without adult caregivers due to the Hogsmeade Event, please inform the ICW as soon as possible. Owl post and messages can be sent to 'Captain of the Watch, ICW' at Diagon Alley, Tinworth or Hogsmeade Valley as is convenient.

-o\0/o-

"So... Susan." Segolene called, walking into a room full of English witches.

"Yes?" The ex-Hufflepuff answered, trying and failing to turn away from the television. Susan was a good ten years or more older than the Teletubbies target audience but the primary colors and soothing background music held the pureblood witch spellbound.

The French brunette sat down on the couch not far from Susan, dropping a fair sized sketch pad down on the strawberry blonde's lap. Having a sketch pad dropped on her finally brought Susan out of her Big Hug induced trance. She looked down.

Hermione also noticed the sketchbook and scooted a little closer. She's seen inside that sketchbook before. It held all of Segolene's fashion ideas.

Segolene turned to Susan. "You still have your Hogwarts uniform, yes?"

"Yes?"

Susan was too slow in opening the book before her, so Segolene grabbed the front cover and began flipping through it herself. As the pages began to fly by, Susan began to take more interest in the art on her lap. Ballroom gowns were replaced with swimwear and then school uniforms.

And then Susan saw one Segolene's lingerie/role-play sketches.

"Is... is that?..."

Hermione nodded, not that Susan could see. The ex-Puff's eyes were glued to a colorful pencil sketch of the most scandalous Gryffindor uniform she'd ever seen. That she could recognize the model was no less amazing.

"We'll have to see what can be done with yellow and black. No tartan this time, I think, just stripes... and more cleavage. Much, much more cleavage." Segolene mused aloud.

Susan's eyes were about to pop out of her head.

"I'm still waiting for mine, you know..." A dreamy voice rose from behind the three witches. Luna's head popped up over Susan's shoulder. "Blue with bronze accents."

Segolene looked back at Luna and smiled eagerly. Another model to play with.

"Pity they took away my tie and house badge before hiding me away." Luna lost her dreamy smile for just a moment before regaining it. "We'll have to replace them."

"I'll go get my copy of *Hogwarts: A History*." Hermione chirped before moving off the bed. "There is a lovely illustration of the Ravenclaw coat of arms on page seven hundred and forty-two."

"Get your uniform out, won't you?" Susan nodded and moved to do so.

"Do you think, if we sent an owl to Flitwick, he might be willing to send her trunk to us?" Susan asked.

Hermione stopped just short of the threshold. "I... I don't know. I doubt he would refuse if Luna's things are still at Hogwarts."

Right before a debate on the likelihood of Luna's things being both available and returnable could get going, a distinctive bell tone began to ring through the Delacour home.

"They're back!" Hermione shouted, the excitement of learning lost lore tearing her away from plans to write a letter to the half-goblin charms professor.

And indeed, they were back.

Hermione was half-way through leading the other witches down to meet the returning group of Delacour women when she came face to face with a disgruntled specter. Very disgruntled if his coarse mutterings were any measure.

"Language, Harry!" Hermione stopped at the head of a staircase.

Harry went silent, but didn't look very penitent.

"Have you come to fetch us?" Segolene asked. Surely whatever they had found out, it would be big.

"No." Harry ground out. "Madame Mitterrand decided to use her position as a Veela grand matron to order everyone about. She sent me away so that they could discuss Veela business without interference. Apolline wasn't about to refuse her own mother and I really didn't want to put Gabby in a position where she'd have to chose between me and her own grandmother."

Harry then remembered that two of the girls in front of him wouldn't know what he was saying and- well... did he really want them to know?

"But... but it isn't just Veela business!" Hermione shot back. "If anything, it's both Veela and Angel business! And she'd want to hear what you have to say anyway, wouldn't she? Surely Gabrielle won't be able to answer all her questions without you... unless you wrote them down when you were there... did you?"

Harry burned a hole in the stairs with his glare. Well, if he had laser vision, he would have.

"We didn't write anything down. Didn't stick to your lists either- not that we didn't cover important bits 'cause we did- but I did hear Régine telling Apolline to find her a pensieve after she sent me on my way."

"Does she have a pensieve?" Hermione asked.

"It's in Poppa's study. I've never seen anyone use it, but there is one." Segolene confirmed.

"Well!" Hermione huffed in indignation before looking back to Harry again. "It's not like she can tell you who you can and cannot talk to."

Hermione didn't even consider the possibility that there could be anything Harry would withhold from her... and didn't Segolene deserve as much?

Harry didn't really feel like commenting on Hermione's rant. He could see all four witches and was beginning to lose his self-righteous edge. Did he really want to tell Luna or Susan anything? Did Hermione deserve to know everything?

The bond between him and Gabby was just about as pure and good as any bond could get. Surely he'd never heard of it's like in History of Magic nor in any of the fairy tales he read in the non-magical world. Still, it was a bond. Michael and Gabriel were clear on the image of a chain between Angel and Lord, even if it was forged with love. Hermione would not like this image.

On the other hand, she was much less preachy about house elves recently, so she may be able to take this news without getting behind a pulpit.

On the other hand, if details on his bond with Gabby were ever leaked for any reason no matter how seemingly innocent at the time... then someone might be able to figure out how to break the chain again. It's been done before.

Harry's protective instincts began to surge in the back of his mind and a bad feeling developed in the pit of his stomach.

Wait a tic, Harry didn't have a stomach. That bad feeling was Gabby's.

"Gabby's crying." Harry stated plainly before vanishing right in front of the girls.

Hermione bolted down the staircase. He wouldn't have gone far.

Only a minute before, things were deceptively calm in Alain's study.

Gabby was coloring. To be fair, she was using a charcoal pencil and pastels instead of the wax crayons most her age color with, but the point is that she was depicting all of her new friends on paper and she was having fun doing it. Those halos were going to be tricky though... hey, didn't she have some metallic tinted oil paints?

"Merde!" Régine cursed as she was thrown clear of the pensieve.

At Little Angel's grand-mère's shout, the girl to stopped making her 'I'm concentrating' face and she dropped her unfinished artwork.

Fleur and Apolline were both ejected just as forcefully, though they managed to refrain from using language unfit for little ears.

"How could she even do that?" Apolline wondered aloud.

Gabrielle stared at them from her father's chair, silently wondering why they were done so quickly and why her grand-mère was so angry. She put down the stick of light blue she was about to use to fill her eyes in with. "How could who do what?"

Régine tried to hold back her instincts but the glare she sent Gabrielle's way caused the little girl to shrink into herself a little. Gabrielle's seen Grand-mère made that face before, but never at her.

"Please, Maman. We should have expected something like this." Apolline soothed her mother. "The temple is for Veela, but the Hall is for Angels only."

Fleur saw Gabrielle and called softly. "Little Angel."

"Yes?" She replied.

"White hair. Tan skin. Purple eyes." She looked into her sister's eyes and saw no sign of surprise. "Who is she?"

Gabrielle tilted her head in confusion. They were just in her memory, weren't they? Shouldn't they know?

"Gabrielle, please." Her mother called. "Who is this woman with white hair and purple eyes?"

Little Angel was confused. She was confused and Grand-mère was angry. Her stomach started tying itself into knots.

"Lucifer." Gabby half whispered.

The low volume clearly didn't help. All three older Veela were clearly beyond surprised to hear her answer. She saw a wave of incredulous stares the likes of which he'd never seen before.

"What did she do?" Little Angel asked.

"She kicked us out." Apolline called from the side. "And what do you mean, 'Lucifer'?"

"She's a nice girl. She is." Gabrielle looked into her mother's eyes to see that she was no less shocked than a moment ago. "She even made Angel School and everything! God told her to!"

"Gabrielle! It is not normal for a memory to talk back to you. It's not normal for a memory to kick you out..." Régine was not using her nice voice and Little Angel's face was getting tight. "... and is certainly not normal to have the Ruler of Hell in your head!"

"She's not the ruler of Hell!" Gabrielle shrieked back, her voice getting higher and beginning to break. She never yelled at her grand-mère before. "Lucifer is a good girl! They broke her! She didn't do it!"

Gabby's last words brought forth a river of tears and a soft, low moan.

"Gabby!" A concerned English ghost materialized right next to his angel. "Gabby?"

Clearly she was too upset to answer. As there was no dark wizard in the room trying to hurt or kill anyone, Harry dealt with the crying little girl. Without thought of the older Veela in the room- nor even the four witches who were just entering from the hall- Harry went inside his angel and filled her with love.

Gabby stopped moaning, but a few sniffles did manage to get through.

"What's going on?" Segolene asked Fleur, but the younger Veela was cut off by her grand-mère.

"It's bad enough that there's a dead English boy in my granddaughter's head! Now I find out that she's possessed by the Devil as well? I will not stand for it!" Régine barked.

As the tension in the room rose to an even higher level than before, Gabrielle's countenance shifted from misery to defiance.

"You're going to tell Harry you're sorry! You're going to say you're sorry for yelling at Lucifer too!" Gabrielle's declaration earned a few more gasps from the new arrivals. The ones who spoke French, anyway. "Lucifer is a good girl! Her Lord loved her very much! I bet he still does! I know he does!"

Gabrielle spun in place to glare at Hermione instead of the angry Veela grand matron. Lucifer said something to Harry before that made him understand really quick. What was it again? Oh-

"Chamber of Secrets, 'Mione."

With those four words, the littlest girl in the room made a run for the door. She left the room, shot up the stair and ran right into her bedroom. Hermione followed the little angel without hesitation.

Before an angry grand-mère could follow, a hand clamped down on her arm.

"No, Maman." Apolline said in a soft yet firm tone. Hermione wasn't the only one to immediately understand the meaning of 'Chamber of Secrets'. Apolline held her own mother in place as the room cleared of teens, every one of them following Little Angel and Hermione. "We clearly do not see the whole picture."

Pushing back the anger at being rebuked by both her own child and grandchild, Régine followed Apolline's gaze to a drawing sitting on a coffee table in the middle of the room. In the incomplete work, four figures were drawn close together in the middle of the paper. There was a smiling little girl, a figure Apolline immediately took to be Gabrielle's self image. Behind Gabrielle were two women in robes. They were both smiling, and one had a yellow-orange mix in her eyes and hair. The other one had brown eyes and brown hair. The third grown up figure was kneeling next to Gabrielle. This woman was smiling and holding Gabrielle's hand... and her eyes were light purple. Lucifer. Lucifer was smiling and holding Little Angel's hand as two other 'angels' stood behind them.

Chamber of Secrets indeed.

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"Look, Ron. Hedwig."

Ginny's brother wasn't the only one to hear her. Hedwig's distinctive plumage was quick to gain attention after having been absent from these halls for months. The snowy white owl set herself down in front of Ron's plate, collecting more and more stares until it seemed that every witch and wizard in the room was watching her.

Ron ran his fingers through Hedwig's feathers ignorant of the extra attention. After a friendly petting, he went for the note attached to Hedwig's leg. Ginny was going to wait her turn and read the note after her brother was done with it... 'was' being the operative term after Ron let out a snort at something.

"She didn't!" Ginny hissed after reading the missive for herself.

Ron laughed in response, "Of course she did."

"Did what?" It came from one of the Creevey brothers, not that Ron could tell which one without looking.

"Mione grounded Harry!" Ron shouted loud enough for just about everyone to hear. Luckily for a certain Headmaster, he wouldn't need to seek a private conference with Mister Weasley now that the boy was blurting everything out loud. "She didn't like him sneaking off to Hogwarts without her and getting Gabby into so much trouble. He can't cross the Chancel until she gives him permission to."

Ginny looked at the white owl that hadn't quite left yet. "Will you stay long enough for me to write Harry a letter?"

Hedwig barked twice and began to pick meat off of a chicken bone on Ron's plate.

"Oi! I wasn't finished with that you stupid bird!" Ron complained.

Hedwig grabbed the piece of chicken in question and hopped four plates away to better guard her meal. Many of the students and 'expelled' muggleborns began to laugh at Ron's misfortune. Soon enough, a small game of Feed Hedwig was started. Ron briefly

spied the chicken breast that got away before returning his attention to the food still on his plate. He knew when to cut his losses.

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"I admit it." Susan murmured. "I'm confused again."

"It isn't you Susan. It's the wrackspurts making your brain go fuzzy. Daddy always said they breed most during international incidents." Luna consoled her friend as the two tried to settle down in front of the telly. Susan was trying anyway; Luna was much less shaken to begin with.

"What's going on?" Cedric asked. He was in control of the remote when the girls came down and he was currently submerged in muggle world news; there were reports of a war in Bosnia and Cedric wasn't quite sure where Bosnia was or who the Bosnians might be fighting.

"Madame Mitterrand and Gabrielle actually got into a shouting match when they came back from wherever it was that they went today." Susan answered. "I didn't think little Gabrielle was the type to talk back to her elders."

"I wouldn't worry about it if I were you." Luna said. "Our hosts are on the cusp of something extraordinary and I'm not at all surprised that we don't hear everything. I don't know about you two, but I certainly don't sprout wings whenever I fancy. I'm not as close to Harry as my sister is either, so my secret-learning credentials are somewhat lacking."

Cedric and Susan both worked through the dirty blonde's logic and found themselves agreeing. Even the extraordinary bit; surely having an angel in the house isn't ordinary fare.

Two floors up, another group of young witches found themselves seated around a British wizard, though this British wizard was dead.

"So it would appear that at least one of the taunts I heard at school wasn't far from the truth." Fleur said after hearing Harry give an account of the origins of the Veela race. He recounted all he could remember, save the true meaning of the Angel-Lord bond.

"Oh?" Harry asked.

"Fallen angel." Fleur answered. "It was a tame insult compared to most. Those girls who were 'above' coarse language favored it. It would seem as though they were right all along."

"At least we know that a fallen angel is still an angel. And surely the remaining angels would not have cared for the early Veela so well if they were evil." Hermione offered as she began to revise her list of questions Harry absolutely had to ask when he returned to the temple- or rather to the Hall of Angels. "The bond between Angel and Lord must be truly profound if losing it had such an impact on Lucifer and her sisters."

Hermione sat back and tried to calm her mind down. There were too many thoughts flying about due to Harry's revelations for her to even sort through them all. There was the Veela origin story itself... the use of an ancient magical school... hints of magic hidden from mankind for centuries... not to mention the religious implications. Hermione once thought that discovering magic was real would be a nail in the coffin for her religion.

'Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live' indeed.

But now... but now she had sitting next to her living proof that the church she grew up in wasn't completely false. Gabrielle was a witch but she was also an angel. Clearly the message was distorted over time, but there was some truth behind church dogma. There also seemed to be less of a gap between magic and the divine than Hermione once thought as well. Did it mean angels were magical and not divine or did it mean that magical beings were closer to divinity than non-magical beings?

Hermione didn't write that question down. A British pureblood might read her list one day. She couldn't have that.

Hermione quickly penned another question before she could forget it in favor of another random thought. Were any previous angels were also witches?

Hermione forced herself out of her mental tangent and focused on the issue at hand. "I can't begin to imagine what it would be like to have such a bond let alone lose it."

Thinking about angels and their relationships to their Lord, Hermione briefly looked over to the little angel sitting in that very room with her. She immediately noted how fearful Gabrielle looked... almost as if she were afraid she might lose- Hermione almost froze at the idea in her head- that Gabrielle might lose what she already had. Hermione followed Gabby's worried gaze to Harry.

He was trying to comfort her without saying anything that would give them away. He clearly knew what his Angel was afraid of and wasn't about to let it happen.

'Are you Harry's angel?' Hermione had once asked Gabrielle during the Girls Who Have Been Personally Saved By Harry Potter meeting earlier that month. 'Yes!' was the emphatic reply. Why, even Luna's comments that night alluded to the same answer.

"You already know what it's like to have that bond, don't you Little Angel?" Hermione asked the petit silver-blond.

Instead of answering the question, Gabrielle looked to Harry for guidance. That was all the answer Hermione needed, really. She turned back to Harry.

"You're already bound to her, aren't you? I don't mean as a ghost is bound by the circumstances of his death, but as a Lord to his Angel."

Hermione was digging. She was close too. The other girls were all beginning to understand. The idea that Gabrielle might serve a Lord wasn't some far off dream for her future. It was her present. She served one now.

Next to Hermione, Little Angel was looking happier again. She began to preen. It wasn't just being an angel that she thought made her special. It was being Harry's angel. Harry smiled at Gabby and she blushed in response.

Fleur and Segolene were now looking at him like a puzzle to be solved, just as Hermione was. And just like Hermione, the two French witches seemed to have far more of the puzzle put together than Harry expected.

"We were right." Segolene said with conviction. "You didn't just save Little Angel from the mermen in Black Lake, you bonded to her and made her an angel. But... but how?"

"I loved her. I sacrificed myself for her." Harry answered. "Do not underestimate the power of self-sacrifice."

Fleur began to recite her new favorite prayer once again.

"Through me you know eternal life; Through you I know eternal love." The Veela looked at Harry. "We came to the conclusion that the first lines of Little Angel's prayer were literal before Sirius's memorial. Your blood is in her veins. We must have been too focused on the topic of blood magic to see that idea through to its conclusion... that the rest of the prayer is both literal and true as well."

"So, Lord Potter..." Segolene called with a hint of mischief. "How is eternal life treating you so far?"

Harry thought about it. Segolene may have been trying to lighten up the conversation, but with what he's learned... well...

"Well if it weren't for the way things have gone back in England, I'd have to say I quite like it. It may sound bad to you, but I'm much happier now than I was for most of my life." Harry spared a moment to look between his two girls. One of them enjoyed the attention so much that she transformed. "Now, Gabriel did mention... but no. It's too early to say one way or the other."

Was he teasing them?

"Harry." Hermione called one step above a growl. "I suggest you say whatever it is before things get unpleasant for you."

Harry pulled at his collar a bit. That's right. Completely whipped.

"Ummm, well Gabriel did mention that the whole 'I'm dead' thing is a problem that might be resolved one day." Harry watched eyes widen and minds boggle.

"You can be resurrected. Of course." Segolene reacted instinctively. "What's next, Harry? A virgin birth?"

Two can play that game.

"Well... 'Mione..." Harry slid closer to his English love. "As a matter of fact..."

Hermione squeaked and nearly fell off the bed trying to scoot away.

"Just kidding, 'Mione!" Harry held his hands out in a placating motion. "I rather doubt Gabby's angelic powers can get you preggers!"

"It's not her I'm worried about!" The brown haired teen rolled off the back of Gabrielle's bed and looked at her dead boyfriend suspiciously.

It would take hours to disabuse her of the notion that Immaculate Conception might actually work. Several long and arduous hours. Luckily for Harry, being dead gave him a level of patience that no mere mortal could counter. It took the poor boy that long to let go of the idea himself. After all, Gabriel neither confirmed nor denied virgin birth as an angelic or lordly power, she simply hadn't addressed the idea yet.

Downstairs, two mature Veela sat in silence and considered what Apolline's listening charms had picked up. What did it mean for the mother and grandmother of an angel? What did it mean for the Veela race? The answers could not come quickly enough.

-o\0/o-

New Years Eve.

Green flames flared, releasing their wizarding passenger into the hearth of his home.

"Mother?"

Draco looked around the room. True, she hadn't specifically stated that she would be there upon his arrival, but it was her custom and he was returning at a decent hour. Draco may have enjoyed his time at the Greengrass family manor but Mother was not well enough to travel now that Father was... gone... and so Draco was left to make a proper showing of the Malfoy family alone. Not that there was any

ball to go to, of course; it was more about being seen somewhere. A handful of the old lines escaped Hogsmeade without losing a single family member but many pureblood houses were wiped clean from the face of the Earth. Many more were reduced to a small group of under-aged orphans with only house elves to care for them.

House elves or Albus Dumbledore, that is. Ever the showman, Dumbledore had all of these future pureblood heirs and heiresses in Hogwarts Castle and eating from the palm of his hand as soon as possible... they almost seemed to forget why they were even there.

"Mother?"

Mother was not there to greet him as he expected. Draco was concerned.

"Dipsy." He commanded.

POP

"Y-ye-yes, Y-young M-master?" Dipsy responded and bowed low, ready to serve.

"Where is the Lady Malfoy?" Draco asked.

His elf flinched. This would not end well, he thought. "Sh-she is being entertaining m-most honored guest in the conservatory, Young Master. She is."

Draco flinched. Most honored guest... the Dark Lord.

"D-dipsy will stand on lit kitchen stove now if Young Master wishes."

Draco nodded curtly. His chances of getting through the night without some form of pain was almost nil. Dipsy could not be allowed to deliver such bad news without punishment.

Draco turned for the conservatory while behind him a miserable house elf popped away. His passage through the great halls of Malfoy Manor was silent save for his footsteps. Draco could imagine an infinite number of things the Dark Lord might require of him and his mother now that Father died while failing his dark master. None of it comforted him on the long walk. All too soon, the young lord had

his hands on the conservatory door. He pushed it open as smoothly as he could, not knowing if his entry would be noticed.

"Ah, Draco... or should I say Lord Malfoy." A deep, raspy voice called.

Draco turned. A man... well, not quite a man... the Dark Lord stood in the middle of the conservatory's central path. The wizard's body was no less bruised or misshapen than it was on his last visit, though it did seem to move more fluidly now. The Dark Lord was not looking at Draco; instead, he seemed to be focused on a selection of flowers presented together in their own pots. He seemed to be genuinely interested in what he saw.

"My Lord." Draco bowed and answered, not that he wanted to. "I am honored that you would visit my home tonight though it is unexpected. Shall I have the elves prepare a late dinner?"

As Draco rose from his bow, he caught sight of his mother. She appeared at first to be seated comfortably on one a marble bench, but there was something off about her. She had yet to acknowledge his presence.

"Look at you Drakey-pooh! All growed up!" The witch next to his mother was filthy, grossly underweight and wore the most horrendous dirty robes, but there was no mistaking her.

"Aunt Bellatrix." Draco looked between his mother and his aunt.

"You'll have to excuse your mother, young man. There are a great number of dangerous plants in this room and I felt it best that she be restrained... for her own safety of course." The Dark Lord's tone failed to match his words.

"Cissy and I have so much to talk about!" Bellatrix cackled. Suddenly, she got quiet and held her hand up to keep her sister from seeing her lips move, not that Narcissa could see anything other than what was right in front of her. Being magically bound in place will do that. "She got older. Look! I think I see a wrinkle on pretty Cissy's face!"

The obviously unhinged woman then proceeded to trace a line down her sister's cheek; a cheek Draco most certainly didn't see any

wrinkles on. His mother prided herself on her flawless face. Honestly, Draco was proud of his mother for the same reason. Mother was a perfect pureblood witch in every way. Father always said he managed the perfect match.

"There. That one." Draco turned to see the Dark Lord pull a small potted flower away from the rest of the display. "Salvia Cruorum. The Blood Sage."

Draco had to admit that the deep red flower was pretty, but he really didn't have the passion for flowering plants that Mother had. The collection, Mother's private passion, has been winning awards ever since she started it. Why, Father hasn't bribed one of Mother's judge's in eight years. He hasn't needed to.

Without explaining himself, the Dark Lord drew his wand and vanished Narcissa's slippers. He jerked his wand to the side and a thin, straight line was cut across the woman's feet. It wasn't serious but it probably stung and she did begin to bleed. Draco stood motionless. What could he do? Sadly, there was no way to help his mother without dying painfully.

"I have need of your services, young Draco." The monster called as he looked again at the potted plant in his hand.

"Anything, My Lord." Draco responded. He didn't know what was happening, but clearly his mother's well being was tied to his success.

The Dark Lord tightened his grip on the delicate decorative pot until it shattered. The Blood Sage shuddered as small clumps of moist red dirt fell to the floor. He took what remained and placed it directly atop the captive woman's bleeding feet.

"In most cases, the Blood Sage is harmless. Slower and weaker than Devil's Snare, Blood Sage usually feeds on the newly dead or on unfortunate fools who fall asleep while tending to a herd of cattle on the open range. It feeds on fresh blood and is known to keep victims asleep through weak toxins. The Blood Sage can feed off of a grown man for days before its food runs out. Given access to a fresh cut..." the Dark Lord nodded at Narcissa's feet, "...the sage can and will send fresh roots into its victim's veins thus hastening their demise."

Much to Draco's horror, the small flower's stalk began to move and twist. It was growing. Clearly, the plant sensed fresh blood.

"Now. Let's dispense with the pleasantries shall we?" The Dark Lord hissed. "I want you to get something for me."

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"Potter!" A strong voice shouted over the ballroom.

"Krum!" A second voice shouted back.

A very important guest had arrived at the Delacour family seat in the South of France.

"You look different, Potter." The Bulgarian stared at the ghost intensely. "You get hair cut?"

There was a brief pause before Harry rolled backwards and nearly bust his spectral gut laughing.

When Victor Krum allowed himself to smile, the rest of the guests and hosts tonight began giggling and chuckling along with Harry. The room was festive; the bar opened hours ago though no-one had gone too far as of yet. Well... one of the more distant Veela relations may have had a few too many too fast before disappearing with her man early on. Apolline didn't want to know and Zoé was keeping an eye on things for her. It would be fine.

Vic was quickly tackled by a curly brown haired missile, causing him to lean on the gnarled cane in his left hand. He may not need it to move around but the women back home did seem to like a man with a cane any longer, so he held on to it.

Hermione was, of course, very happy to see Victor again. So were the others. The Bulgarian got hugs and kisses from Fleur and Segolene, from Apolline and some of her relatives as well. The large athlete had to drop to his knees to hug Little Angel and was quite surprised when an as yet unidentified young witch stepped up and gave him the same hug and kisses as all the rest. Luna. Luna Lovegood-Granger of the newly formed Lovegood-Grangers. When Hermione explained that they were sisters by adoption, Luna rolled

her eyes and said that it should have been obvious. Hermione didn't look anything like the other three of them in Luna's opinion.

It was still an hour before midnight, much to a lively little girl's delight at still being up, when one last guest entered the party.

"Mione, look." Harry called from behind her as she, Vic and Ced discussed Vic's recovery and chances at a second World Cup showing. Harry floated into the group and pointed to Apolline and the new arrival near a set of glass doors leading outside.

"That's Fleur's cousin Nathalie. I knew she was invited but I didn't expect her to show up." Hermione explained for Victor who was the only one who hadn't met Nathalie yet.

"She looks happier than I would have expected." Cedric commented.

And she did. Before too long, Nathalie snagged a glass of wine from Virginie and was laughing loudly at something Apolline just said. As the four looked on, Fleur and Gabrielle approached Nathalie and traded greetings before trading words. Nathalie laughed again, though not quite so loud, and did something unexpected.

She began whistling and patting her thigh. It wasn't a musical whistle either; it was more of a dog call.

"Arf! Arf! Woof!" Came the far less expected reply as a spectral dog with shaggy hair and loose morals appeared. He began hopping about Nathalie on his hind legs before he dropped down to sniff at her crotch.

"Bad Padfoot! No Veela time for you!" Nathalie shouted in mock outrage. Gabby began shrieking in laughter.

The ghost dog, or rather the ghost dogfather as some began to understand, immediately dropped to the floor and whined pitifully. No Veela time was obviously a horrible punishment.

"PADFOOT!" Two British teens shouted at the same time.

Hermione and Harry crossed the ballroom so quickly that Ced and Vic wondered if apparation were involved. Their target morphed

from a floating transparent dog to a floating transparent man in response.

"Happy New Year, Pup!" Sirius Black shouted happily in all his ghostly glory.

"Happy New Year, Uncle Padfoot!" Gabby called out next to him as Harry playfully swatted at Sirius's shoulder and Hermione began to cry.

Crying witch aside, Harry was feeling quite happy, and a happy Harry was an ecstatic Gabby. And an ecstatic Gabby? An ecstatic Gabby was an Angel Gabby. Hermione's tears dried up under the peaceful loving aura of the new angelic belle of the ball. At least, Gabby was the belle of the ball until twelve fifteen. That was the end of the fireworks and the absolute elf enforced bedtime for little angels on New Year's.

At least she got to see two girls each kiss a boy ghost at the same time. That was neat.

-o\0/o-

Albus looked over his breakfast plate and observed his guests.

There were some students. He did not have all of his students of course. There was still a week before classes resumed. The 'expelled' students were still sitting along Gryffindor table- though if there was one bright spot to this most disheartening of winter breaks, it would be that any employee high enough in the Ministry- correction, the internationally recognized Ministry- there was no one of high enough rank in the Ministry to prevent him from taking them back as students. He had, in fact, already returned all of their wands.

After a rather memorable Christmas Eve, Albus's castle also became the rallying point of many different groups of people aside from students and school staff.

There were the surviving villagers of Hogsmeade; a rather shell shocked group that still couldn't seem to settle on being sorrowful or joyful for their lot in life. Sorrowful in that their home, the most purely magical settlement in the British Isles for many centuries, was gone... or joyful, in that the pureblood elitist oppressors who rose to

prominence in the past six months were gone. Granted, there were reports of a genuine Dark Lord in London, but with most of his supporters dead the refugees felt hope. It was a feeling that few had the last time a Dark Lord went running about the British Isles.

The aging Headmaster continued to think as he finished his meal and made for the Hospital Wing.

Why did they have such hope? Was it the Vengeful Angel who threw down the wicked, burning Hogsmeade in the process? Oddly, no. One all powerful little girl was a true wonder, but safety came in numbers. And cloaks. ICW cloaks.

Running between the students and the displaced villagers was a group of pureblood orphans. They were much worse off than the villagers having lost their loved ones and not their homes, but Albus was hopeful for them. His other guests did not seem to hold a grudge on such young children and there were some new family bonds being made here and there. Perhaps some adoptions may be pertinent in the near future.

The ICW was by far the largest group of temporary guests currently moving about within the walls of Hogwarts Castle. For the first time since Grindelwald threatened the Wizarding World, there were sentries in every tower, a detachment at the front gates and a patrol in the Forbidden Forest. There were officers and support staff running vast operations from the safety of castle wards. It was humbling to note the extreme lack of Englishmen within these detachments, but this was one point where Albus was willing to bend to ICW 'requests' for the Greater Good. Among other reasons, a strong international presence at Hogwarts meant that Albus himself could spend more time away from his charges. He could actually take some important steps that were of the utmost importance in the fight against Tom Riddle... even more important than guarding the school. There were items he needed to collect and questions he needed answered. There was a ring he needed to retrieve.

Perhaps, when Harry Potter once more graced the halls of Hogwarts, he might be willing to speak to his old Headmaster in a civil tone about serious matters. The boy was willing to kill, true, but both he and his 'Little Angel' were given a clear opportunity to kill him and they ignored it completely. Was it proof of light behind the darkness?

Was it merely the naïveté of young dark magicals with more raw power than skill? Was it the influence of a dark artifact slowly turning them in secret?

Perhaps the worst part about the Headmaster's evening was the innumerable issues which demanded a clear mind. Alas, Albus went to bed sober last night. Again.

Albus passed through the main door of Madam Pomfrey's domain and began the short walk to a private room. It was a room reserved for quarantines or the occasional staff injury. It had, of late, become the second home of the school Potions Master and Slytherin Head of House.

"Ah, Severus." Albus called.

Severus Snape made no move to acknowledge the call. He may be awake and in poor spirits or he may well be asleep. One couldn't tell without Severus making some kind of signal. His face was fully engulfed in gauze and much of his right shoulder was as well. A few tufts of greasy hair escaped the confines of white bandages but Albus had to wonder if Severus would return to work with what the muggles call a buzz cut... or perhaps he may try a clean shave.

"Good news, Severus. Poppy informs me that the potions are working perfectly. Of course they are... you brewed them yourself."

Albus waived his wand over the injured man. Though he trusted his healer completely, Albus always felt personally responsible for Severus's health. Severus was one of his favorite success stories- a young man who saw the error of his ways and returned to the light knowing full well the price that must be paid for such reversals. If only young Harry had risen above his petty rivalries and accepted what Severus could teach him about life.

"Expect to be up and about in only a week, not the two weeks Poppy originally expected." Albus got a little bit of his eye twinkle back. "Just in time to teach again. How delightful, don't you think?"

POP

"Headmaster Dumbledore Sir." A tea cosy adorned elf spoke up, head bowed low. "You is having a visitor at the front gates. He is being most anxious, Lord Malfoy is."

Albus turned in surprise.

"Young Draco?" He had to be sure.

They never did find his father's body. Not even a ring or a watch.

"Yes Headmaster Dumbledore Sir. It is being the new Lord Malfoy who is walking up the path and he is being very demanding of seeing you."

"Very well. Escort him up to my office, will you?" Albus requested of the elf.

It bowed even lower and POP'd away.

Albus looked to his Potions Master, his spy and his trusted friend.

"Alas. I am off to right another wrong this morning and the morning is still not even half done yet." The old man ran his fingers through his beard and stood for a moment in deep thought. "The muggles say that there is no rest for the wicked. I, however, am of the opinion that the wicked get far more rest than the righteous. Well... once more into the breach I go. Until next time, Severus."

Severus, as expected, did not acknowledge the Headmaster's departure.

Albus wasted little time in reaching his office, still managing to arrive early enough to settle in and get some work done before the stair charms became active. He refilled Fawkes' feed bowl and gave the phoenix a short head rub.

"Please come in, Mister Malfoy." Albus called out wanting to see if Draco would correct him.

When the young Slytherin entered his headmaster's office, Albus immediately noticed that the boy was frantic; almost like a caged animal. Fawkes let out a few notes of peace and contentment but it hardly affected the young Lord Malfoy.

"Headmaster Dumbledore," Draco stepped up to the man's desk. He looked Albus in the eyes for but a moment before his eyes began to dart to and fro. "I desperately need your assistance. Mother's life is in danger."

Albus set down the quill he was using and leaned forward a bit.

"Most distressing." Albus intoned. "What sort of danger?"

Draco seemed to pull himself together for a moment, but he would no longer meet the headmaster's gaze. Instead, a single sheet of parchment on the Headmaster's desk took his entire focus.

"The Dark Lord visited our home. It was easy for him- father keyed the man into our wards long before I was born. He was there when I came home from Greengrass Manor last night." Draco took a steadying breath. "He ordered me to murder you, Sir."

Albus was motionless. Draco seemed to lose some of his nervous energy after a moment of silence and he fell into a chair behind him. His eyes began to wander, only stopping on the Headmaster for a moment or two at a time.

"If... if I don't kill you and bring your body down to Hogwarts' front gate by tomorrow noon, then Mother will die."

As Albus closed his eyes and centered himself, Fawkes began to sing a slow mournful song in the background. There was a hint of warning in the song, as if the immortal bird sensed that something was off. Albus took no note; Lady Malfoy's life in danger was more than sufficient to affect a light creature, he expected.

Albus noted that Draco was unwilling to meet his gaze. He also noted that the young man's hands were in view but held no wand. Draco had only looked into the Headmaster's eyes for a brief moment, but that was enough for some mind magic at least. Draco was hiding things but what he did say was honest and truthful.

The aspiring dark wizard was effectively laying himself prostrate before the Leader of the Light as Severus had done so many years before. They all learn the horrible cost of dark magic when a woman they hold dear is endangered, don't they? Perhaps if Harry Potter

had lived beyond the Second Task, Albus could have ensured that Miss Granger was constantly under some threat or other. That would have kept Harry's protective nature finely honed- but that is neither here nor there...

"Coming to me was the right thing to do, Mister Malfoy." Albus soothed. "While I must kindly refuse the offer to help you by dying, I think we may be able to do something about the situation."

Albus stood. The ICW oath he took was still in effect, but there were loopholes in any contract and his oath was no different. He would merely visit Malfoy Manor as a guest and offer the Lady Malfoy free lodging at Hogwarts for the foreseeable future. Perhaps if he knew how Sirius Black's will would play out... or if he had the Will sealed, then he could try forcing the Black family property in London to accept Draco as its master. He was the closest male by blood after all and that is what old family wards based their allegiance on most of the time.

Albus mulled over the idea that blood wards and blood allegiance were key components of family magic. No wonder so many of the old lines were traditionally dark.

"What can you tell me of Voldemort's plans?" Dumbledore asked. Draco flinched again, but not as much as before when hearing the Dark Lord's name.

"I'm just supposed to meet him at the gates with your corpse as soon as the deed is done."

"You are not to signal him in any way?"

"No sir."

"And your mother?" Albus pushed. "Did Voldemort stay with her when you came to me?"

"No sir. He left the manor before I did." Draco turned to look directly at his headmaster. "But my aunt Bellatrix is with Mother. Much as I've been taught to love family, that woman is completely off her rocker. She's dangerous... no loyalty to anyone other than the Dark Lord."

Albus failed to comment on Narcissa's other sister, Andromeda. What would happen to her if dark wizards ever decided to punish her for marrying beneath her station? Blood ties would not help the blood traitor or her muggleborn husband. The Tonks family would be wiped out.

Albus stood and made his way to the door.

"Come, Mister Malfoy. We must hurry if we are to catch Voldemort and Bellatrix off guard." Draco barely reacted to the Dark Lord's name that time.

"But Headmaster." Draco started, surprised that the old man chose to act so quickly. "How are we going to get past the front gate without notice? Surely they're waiting for us?"

Albus calmly put one arm around the young lord's shoulders and raised his other arm high. Fawkes spread his wings and leapt off of his golden perch.

"I have my ways, young man." Was all Albus said before a red and gold feather found its way into his hand and the two wizards traveled out of Scotland via phoenix fire travel.

When the flames receded, Draco realized where they were. Home.

Draco walked up to the front gate of Malfoy Manor. It opened for him immediately. Beyond the gate was a large open lawn with several rare magical creatures grazing about a perfectly proportioned lake. One of the less rare specimens of bird by the shoreline looked oddly at the two wizards just long enough for a long tentacle to shoot out of the water, wrap around the bird's neck and begin pulling it into the water. Lunchtime. Fawkes, who was perched on the Headmaster's shoulder, was not amused.

"If you would please show me to your mother and aunt, I would appreciate it Mister Malfoy." Albus called.

"Of course, Sir."

The two walked down a long scenic path that wound through the front lawn. Draco knew not to stray from the path, lest he find himself in the stomach of one of Father's more exotic specimens.

Well... Draco supposed that they all belonged to him now. After a half hour of silence, they reached the cut stone paving of the front courtyard and front fountain. Fawkes bid them adieu at the fountain and flew up to the highest tier for a drink and a good perch.

As Draco approached the front entry doors of the manor itself, they opened. Two wizards stepped into the grand entry hall of Malfoy Manor and into the splendor of old money. The room was... not quite as large as the Great Hall of Hogwarts but still quite large. There were many more magical paintings and works of art lining the walls than the Great Hall had. A grand stair could be seen at the far end of the hall spiraling up to serve two higher floors.

"Which way to your mother, then?" Albus asked, wand out and tasting the air about him.

"There is a hall by the stair. On the left. Mother should be in the conservatory at the far end of the wing."

Albus accepted the young man's directions and the two set about crossing the hall. Due to the hard stone flooring, both men's footsteps rang out and echoed off the walls again and again. As the pair neared the spectacular winding stairs, another noise began to fill the room. A third set of footsteps.

Albus slowed to a stop and Draco stopped next to him. The third set of steps continued. All too soon a figure appeared on the lowest landing of the grand stair now only twenty paces away.

Voldemort.

It was the first time that Dumbledore had come face to face with the dark wizard once known as Tom Riddle since Professor Quirrel brought the man's spirit into Hogwarts castle. Even then, he was only a possessing spirit with only the narrowest of holds on his host. The last time they met as whole men was back when Lily Potter was still very much alive. Albus looked at his one time student and despaired for what the dark arts could do to a soul.

The man was still bruised and battered; daylight did nothing for his complexion. Not one bit of him looked symmetrical or balanced from side to side and his slightly ill-timed movements were witness to the deformities. Voldemort's red eyes sat upon a face that was stretched

tight over bone and missing a nose save for two holes with which to breathe. Either the Dark Lord was constantly scowling or he lacked enough tissue around his mouth to close his cracked, bruised lips. A cloak concealed much, but uneven shoulders and two questionable bulges on Voldemort's upper back told their own stories. This was not the same duelist Albus had faced so many times before. This decay was welcomed by the old headmaster for he was not the true master of the wand in his hands. It would not serve him as well as it had last time.

"You have done well, Draco." The Dark Lord called. "Your efforts today may very well save the Malfoy line from destruction."

Draco began to step away from the headmaster. He turned as if to speak to the headmaster but thought better of it and continued on his way to safety.

"Using students against their headmaster now, Tom?" The Headmaster shook his head in a disappointed fashion. "You never could stand in the light of day before... and now I see that to be doubly so. Just what have you done to yourself?"

The Headmaster's opponent showed a mouth full of broken, jagged teeth in a move that was half grin and half scowl.

"You just can't trust Gryffindors to do anything right." The dark wizard returned. "I should have expected Pettigrew to be a failure... after all... he failed his friends in his youth. He failed you as well. He payed for his failures, make no mistake."

A yew and phoenix feather wand came free of its hiding place and the wizard holding it began to descend the last few stairs between him and violent combat.

"He failed himself most of all, Tom. I'm sure that he would redeem himself if only he could truly understand what it is he's done... if he could see the world around him without focusing on his own survival." Albus lectured on. Even in the midst of an obvious deathtrap, he would continue to teach his ways to anyone and everyone. Draco was still in the room after all. "I'm sorry that I failed you, Tom. I should have paid better attention. I should have seen your pain."

A bright purple globe shot out of Voldemort's wand only to be thrown aside in a shower of sparks after striking Dumbledore's conjured shield.

"Pain? I know not pain! I know not weakness!" The Dark Lord roared, lifting his arms high. "Common wizards and muggles feel pain. They are weak. Weak like you."

Voldemort summoned a great fire serpent. It uncoiled from his wand, growing into a beast only slightly smaller than the basilisk in the Chamber of Secrets. A fiery orange mouth opened revealing glowing red fangs and a hiss that threatened to consume life and spirit both. As the fire snake struck, Albus forced it back with invisible winds. The snake pushed against its unseen enemy and a shower of sparks and flames flew back into the walls and floor around them. As Voldemort called his serpent back to ready another strike, Albus conjured a great whirlpool between them on the stone floor. Spinning waters combined with his winds to form a waterspout which, when directed at Voldemort's serpent, dispelled the fire magic in a great hissing rush of steam.

The steam cleared away, and as the steam cleared, the veil which allowed each wizard to prepare was pulled away. A marble golem half-again the size of a troll stepped away from its dark creator. As the golem made of broken stair and wall lumbered forward under Voldemort's command, Albus turned to his strengths and animated four statues from by the wall to his right. The statues, which consisted of a roman general, two wood nymphs and an elder statesman, ran between the golem and their own master. The larger stone beast made a dash for Albus only to be tripped up by nymphs as the male statues combined their efforts to attack one of the golem's arms.

As two magical duelists managed a four on one battle of animated and transfigured stone, a young man watched the duel from what cover he could find.

"Drakey-pooh..." Draco closed his eyes at the words, but otherwise failed to react to the woman stalking up behind him. "Oooooohhhhhh... Master is playing. I want to play too!"

Bella came even with Draco in the hall corner he was using for cover. Unlike Draco, the witch stood out in the open. She reveled in the

spectacular display of power and killing intent being unleashed. Soon, the stone avatars were all broken piles of scrap between the two dueling men. Fawkes flashed into the room and circled above the two only to have Voldemort send a handful of Killing Curses at the bird until it flashed away in retreat. The two titans then began pushing raw magic at each other. Voldemort's Killing Curse green beam collided head on with Albus's fiery red assault and the ground between them was being lashed repeatedly with lethal secondary explosions.

"How can they possibly keep this up? Do they even realize we are here, watching?" Draco whispered.

Bellatrix heard him.

"Oh, my Master always knows where I am... at his side... always waiting for his word... killing the blood traitors as all good little girls do... yes. That's Bella!" She giggled.

The witch turned to stare uncomfortably at her nephew. There was insanity in her eyes, but there was also anger.

"But you! You didn't come with my Master. You, baby dragon... you came with the blood traitor Dumby-door! You are a bad, bad boy!"

Draco backed away from his aunt in alarm, completely missing that fact that he was being pushed into the massive hall instead of away from it.

"N-now Aunt Bella... I was only doing what the Dark Lord wanted... You know that!" He pulled his wand anyway; the woman advancing on him was well known to be a crazy bitch.

"Master won't want me interrupting his fun-" Bella cooed as a rainbow of magical bolts lit up the room behind Draco, "but that doesn't mean I can't have some fun of my own!"

Draco took another step back and cast the strongest shield he could muster.

"Crucio!" Bella screamed.

The young Lord Malfoy crumbled like a rag doll, shaking and screeching uncontrollably.

Up until that point, the Headmaster and the Dark Lord had been keeping each other in check spell for spell and strength for strength. There were black gouges in the stone at their feet and small fires on the walls where portraits once hung. But the stalemate could not go on forever. Draco's scream made sure of that.

Albus's attention wavered for just a moment, just one heartbeat really, but that was all it took. Voldemort's next bolt of dark red power punched through the light wizard's wavering shield and smacked the old man's upper chest.

Albus was on the floor and bleeding heavily even before Draco's last cries subsided.

"As I said." Voldemort hissed as he closed the distance to his wounded foe. "Weak."

"Oh? Did I interrupt something, Master?" Bella asked her Dark Lord, her eyes wide in faux innocence.

"Do not worry yourself, my dear." Her Master replied as he summoned the wand from his defeated foe's hand. "He lost focus. I won."

Draco tried to pull himself up, but he was having trouble. It hurt so much. All he could do was watch as Bella and the Dark Lord walked up to Albus Dumbledore as he struggled to breathe in a pool of his own blood.

"I won..." Voldemort drew both wands up high before shoving them both back down together. They were both aimed right at the old man on the floor. Albus's eyes widened a split second before the inevitable happened.

A spray of blood and gore blew out from the Headmaster's chest, covering both Dark Lord and dark witch in a fine red mist. Albus Percival Wulfric Brian Dumbledore was no more.

"I won!"

Bellatrix began giggling incessantly. She took her wand between the folds in her robe and tried to clean the gore off of it. Voldemort didn't even bother cleaning his wand. Instead, he reached down to the body before him and roughly ripped a fist full of beard hair away from Dumbledore's body.

"Come with me, Draco." Voldemort commanded.

Draco looked at him fully intending to comply out of fear alone, but his thoughts must have been clear on his face.

"Still fearful of your mother's chances of survival? Of yours even?" The blood spattered wizard taunted. "Aid me with this one last task and your mother shall recover completely. It won't take but an hour... half that if you do your job and stop those who would delay us..."

Voldemort turned towards the wing of Malfoy Manor that had been his hide-away for some months now and quickly began eating up the distance in long strides. Draco followed.

"Who... who would delay us, My Lord?" Draco managed after some effort. "What is this task we are to perform?"

"Oh, nothing too difficult, I assure you young Lord Malfoy." Voldemort chuckled. He was in a good mood. Albus Dumbledore was dead. "There is something on Hogwarts grounds that I want... and with him dead, I will get it. I shouldn't even need to kill anyone to do it either! Ha!"

"Don't you worry, Drakey-pooh!" Bella called out from behind them. "I'll take good care of your precious mummy! I will!"

Draco didn't turn around. If he did, then she would have seen how much he wanted to hex her to death just then.

"And you should see the flowers, Drakey-pooh!" She cackled. "They're gorgeous... simply to die for!"

He'd do her slowly... Father used to talk about taking weeks to kill someone. Draco never understood why before. Now he understands perfectly.

Just outside of Malfoy Manor, a red and gold bird cried a song of mourning and loss before flame-traveling out of sight.

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Albus gasped in alarm as he rose to a sitting position.

He was in a boat. It was a wooden boat, one that might fit three or four passengers to a bench along several benches. In front of Albus, heavy mists restricted his view to not more than a few meters over the water, and behind him... behind him was the boatman, plying unnaturally calm waters with his oar. Albus patted down his chest. There was no blood, no tears in his robes, there was no pain. In fact, several minor pains that he had associated with age were gone as well.

Albus went back over the last few minutes in his mind. Draco. Voldemort. Draco screaming. Pain and then... and then... death?

"Excuse me... Charon, is it?" Albus called to the cloaked figure.

He could not be certain of the boatman's identity as the man's cloak held his face in impenetrable shadows. He was a bit on the short side, but that was not sufficient to narrow the possibilities. There was also no response to Albus's question. The boatman only stood there and continued to ply the water which, to Albus's eyes, appeared inky black. The silence was uncomfortable for Albus. He was used to having more knowledge and more secrets than anyone he met.

"Sir," Albus spoke up again, "am I to believe that we are crossing the River Styx?"

Again there was no answer. This vexed Albus, but he was as yet unwilling to force himself upon the boatman. Though he was unprepared to begin his next Great Adventure, he was clearly on his way. Best to take a positive attitude about it.

The headma- former headmaster tried to ignore his silent neighbor and took a closer look at his surroundings. The boat, however new to him, seemed unremarkable aside from its occupants. The few odds and ends at rest on the floorboards seemed unexceptional. Albus looked out of the boat. The mists were thick and white and

restricted Albus's view past a few meters in any direction including straight up. The sun was... well, there was no proof for its existence. The boat existed in a soft near twilight state which robbed the color and detail of things. No wonder Albus couldn't see the boatman's face.

The water he could study. Albus closed in on the left gunwale, grasping it with both hands, and peered over the side. Black. The water didn't just seem murky, it seemed as black as India ink. He couldn't even detect the slightest reflection off the water's surface.

He released the gunwale with one hand and began to reach for the surface.

"I wouldn't do that if I were you." The boatman warned.

His voice was quite familiar.

"Harry?" Albus turned quickly, the water almost forgotten. "Is that you, my boy?"

With one hand, the boatman drew back his hood. Indeed, it was Harry.

"Headmaster Dumbledore." Harry started coolly. "I'll have you know I am not permitted to enter England at this time. If coming to fetch you qualifies as entering England then I shall be quite cross with you."

A little bit of the old eye twinkle returned to Albus's old orbs.

"I would be most happy to vouch for your innocence if only you could turn this craft around." Albus let out a great sigh. "There was much left undone when I passed."

Harry snorted. His task of rowing was now forgotten and the oar was simply held to give his hands something to do.

"No doubt. Busy man. Great man, yeah? Leader of the Light and all that. You seem to have gotten your light extinguished, mate."

"This is no laughing matter, young man." Albus admonished. "With my death there is no sure check to Voldemort's lust for power."

"So tens of thousands of wand wielding wizards is no sure check? You seem to think ol' Tom has the powers of a god at his disposal." Harry offered.

"Not a god, but not unlike one in some respects, Harry. I have told you already that Voldemort has managed to cheat death. He is immortal after a fashion... one may strike him down but he will rise again and again and again unless steps are taken."

"Okay then..." Harry nodded. "The big baddie has a secret power or something. What is it? A magical amulet or something? Maybe some Egyptian device? I actually saw an ankh recently you know..."

Harry drifted off for a moment. Thoughts of a treasure laden room and a group of Veela filling his mind. "It was a real one... had to be, I'm sure of it. I bet the Egyptians knew how to come back considering what even the muggles know of them now. This is where you tell me how to beat him now that you've gone and snuffed it, right?"

Albus looked at his former student. For the first time in ages, Harry looked just like the eager pupil that had been hiding from his Headmaster ever since a fourth scrap of paper shot it's way out of an enchanted cup. Alas.

"I'm afraid not, Harry." The old man said with no small amount of regret. "You absolutely must change your ways before I can entrust you with what must be done. Your propensity to violence in the past year has caused me great anguish, young man."

"Oh really?" Harry mocked the man. "You know what? You got me. I'm evil."

Dumbledore frowned. "This is no laughing matter, young man."

"It is from where I'm standing, old man." Harry returned gaily. "You keep saying I'm one of the bad guys like I got picked for the dark side during a schoolyard game of evil tag or something. You also seem to think that you and you alone can defeat Evil and lead the Light. Capital letters on both of those, mind you."

Albus sighed heavily. The boy was much worse now than ever before. How could he have gone so far astray? Why now? When so much depended on success?

"Now, the Saving Maidens thing I can do." Harry continued. "Quite good at that, actually... so I don't think I'll be signing up for any lessons there..."

How could he make the boy see reason? Maybe a shock to the system?

"Everyone you love will be killed." Albus stated with as much conviction as he could muster.

Harry wasn't smiling now.

"That will not happen." Harry almost snarled. If anything, Albus was only more worried by the boy's attitude. "If you will not tell me what I need to know to get rid of Voldemort then I'll find someone who can."

"Oh?" Albus poked. "And who will speak to you of magic most rare? Of ways to put off death indefinitely and how to undo them once they are done?"

"Gabriel for one." Harry answered without pause. "Michael, surely. I dare say she has a history of combating the very techniques you speak of... though I bet Gabby and her new best friend could really bond over smiting evil like they did in the old days."

Albus must have looked as confused as he was, for Harry saw his face and continued.

"She and Lucifer are best friends now. First angels, the both of them."

Only after seeing his ex-Headmaster's face turn yet again did Harry realize that naming Gabby's new best friend out loud may not have helped him any.

"Fraternizing openly with demons, Harry? Have you really fallen so low?" Albus said with more than a hint of accusation in his voice.

Harry looked up to the sky as if God... as if some god or other... might smite Albus simply for being a narrow minded prat. It didn't happen.

"Did the Chamber of Secrets teach you nothing, Headmaster? I was demonized again in fourth year for a time." Harry looked Albus in the eye. "Lucifer's story is like that... only she's been dragged through the mud much worse than I got."

"Devils speak with forked tongues, Harry." Albus was unmoved.

"Then why are you even listening to me? You think I've gone dark, right? You already think I'm one of them." Harry challenged.

"You must listen." Albus ground out. "You cannot meet your destiny ignorant of the true path to victory."

"I'll ask around for how a Dark Lord might go about cheating death and look for a way to undo it. Trust me... the old angels aren't around anymore, but they left memories of themselves behind. Lucifer's really a nice girl."

Dumbledore's eyes widened. "You didn't!"

Harry looked blankly back at him. "I didn't... what?"

"Meeting a memory of Lucifer... of course the Prince of Lies would lead you astray." Albus seemed more sure of himself than ever before. To Harry, never before did the old man seem more off his rocker. "You yourself bring up the Chamber of Secrets, Harry. Do you not remember Tom's diary?"

"Had Tom still in it. Sure. I'm not seeing the connection."

Albus stepped closer to Harry. He had to make the boy understand.

"Harry. The diary was able to do what it did because a part of Voldemort's own soul was bound into the book. Miss Weasley's interactions with the soul fragment caused it to feed off of her life. Voldemort was genuinely close to returning to physical form before his soul shard was destroyed. Now... Harry... whatever this object is that you use to communicate with Lucifer, you must stop at once.

Having Voldemort reborn to the world unchecked is a dark enough thought that I cannot even begin to imagine having a demon prince walk amongst the living."

Albus reached out and grabbed Harry by his shoulders.

"That must not happen!" The old man was practically yelling now. "I will turn you if I can, but If I cannot then I will stop you from returning to unleash that evil upon the world!"

"You've gone completely barmy, haven't you?" Harry asked, more than a little uneasy with the way Albus was staring him in the eye.

What Albus said next was practically a whisper. "What I do, I do for the greater good of all mankind."

And with that, Albus pushed down on Harry with all his might. The Headmaster may not have been a strong man but he was very motivated and Harry was still a fourteen year old boy. He wasn't prepared to be attacked while piloting a boat over the River Styx either. Harry fell back, hitting the back of his head on the gunwale and loosing his grip on the oar. Harry's vision blurred for a second, but he could clearly hear the oar fall completely into the water.

When his vision cleared up a bit, a most unwelcome sight greeted him. His head was over the side and he could see the black void of the deep beneath him. He began to fight back desperately. He did not fancy swimming through that. Seeing as they were already dead, neither combatant seemed likely to run out of steam anytime soon, but Albus had the advantage of weight and position. Harry was slowly getting closer to being pushed overboard.

Hermione was right. Leaving France was a bad idea.

What Harry needed now was nothing short of a miracle, so he began to pray in the back of his mind. This prayer manifested in a oath that Harry would have never considered uttering had he not spent so much time in France.

"Sweet Jeanne, for the love of God, help me!"

"Aaaahhh!" That shout wasn't Harry. It was Albus.

The weight holding Harry down was suddenly lifted. As he struggled to right himself, there was a high pitched grunt followed by a loud splash from the other side of the boat. Harry braced himself and turned to meet the Headmaster before he could overcome whatever accident befell him.

But Albus wasn't in the boat anymore. Instead, lying on the floorboards was Harry's savior with boot clad feet raised high in the air after ejecting Albus from the boat."

"For a noble spirit and a very flattering request, your prayers have been answered!" She said triumphantly. "Stop looking at my legs, Harry."

"Jeanne!" Harry shouted. Hell yes, he was glad to see her. "What are you doing here?"

The French patron saint held one hand up in a silent request. Harry immediately took it and helped the girl to her feet. Once they were both standing, Harry pulled Jeanne into a tight hug.

"Thank you, Jeanne. Really." Harry continued when she didn't reply. "Is this what it felt like for 'Mione and Ginny and Gabby? If it is, then that whole 'getting saved' thing feels pretty brilliant but I can do without the 'needing to get saved' bit, thank you very much."

Jeanne laughed. After the shock wore off, Harry did too. The two were eventually able to calm down enough to try talking again.

"Sooooo..." Harry started. "You threw Albus out of the boat?"

Jeanne nodded. "Really Harry. Giving him a chance to be a good boy and chose to let go is fine and good, but try not to do it over the Styx next time."

She looked over the side and into the darkness that claimed a man widely acclaimed to be the greatest wizard since Merlin himself. She made a face.

"I'm not sure what would have happened had you fallen in Harry. In a place like this, there is more than just symbolism in that water."

"Right. Dumbledore's not coming back up then?" Harry asked.

Jeanne shook her head. Honestly, Harry knew the answer to his own question even before he asked. He was the boatman on this trip after all. Albus's choices were simple. Have a civil conversation with Harry... learn something important... and maybe step onto dry land on the far bank. Or what? Or fall in, that's what. Well, he fell in, didn't he?

Harry looked around the floorboards until he found a spare oar and picked it up.

"Where to, milady?" Harry asked Jeanne as he once more took up his station at the stern.

Smiling, Jeanne sat on the seat nearest him and made herself comfortable.

"I need to go back, of course... but that can wait, can't it?" Jeanne and Harry traded smiles. Here, just as in their trip through the grassy fields, they had forever and a day if they wanted it. "Just hit land eventually, Harry. In the mean time, I want to hear all about our angel and what mischief you two got into while I was away."

"And you. I want to know what you've discovered in the Great Beyond and all that." Harry countered.

"Harry..." Jeanne teased. "You should know I can't talk about that."

Harry mock pouted. Jeanne laughed again.

"Well..." Jeanne looked like she was trying to say the best possible thing but she was having trouble wording it just right. "I think... I've found that the truth is both more simple and more complicated than anyone could ever imagine. I'm sure you will understand. One day."

"I'm sure to pass eventually. And when that time comes, I want you there to explain it all to me."

"I'll be there."

Harry gave her his best grin and put his new oar into the water. Their journey continued.

End Chapter

Chapter Notes:

(1) Wow, that took a lot of time. For a while there, I had other things on my mind. Our family computer network lost one desktop to a melted motherboard and another to viral infestation. Go ahead and laugh. We're replacing both of them; they were old anyway. Still, I should install a button on my author's page so that you can kick my arse if the wait between chapters is too long.

(2) If anyone wants to know what books I'm reading, as they do help me with the religious/historical background and theory, then you should check out the following two: *Misquoting Jesus: The Story Behind Who Changed the Bible and Why* by Bart Ehrman and *The History of the Devil* by Paul Carus. Good stuff whether you are a true believer or not.

(3) I know I've switched to PM'ing those who review and I think need to be replied to, and I've cut my pre-chapter notes, but I just want to say again that this story would not be what it is without the reviews I get from you people. If a question asked (even by an anon review) has merit, I will address it in some way.

(4) For the review from Dain (no return email) I did consider the very issues you brought up before finishing the last chapter. Where did the earlier angels come from? Were they made in a similar way or different way than Gabby? Why do they know what happened to Harry/Gabby and how to replicate it? That is a level of pre-history that may not have a place in this story. 'What came before the chicken and the egg?' is what you're asking. Well, if I follow the same logic path as some of my source material, then God did it. If I actually do end up answering these questions in detail, look forward to a magical world origin myth inspired by Tolkien. More from *The Silmarillion* and less from *The Lord of the Rings*. I don't see the point of going that far really. My characters need a reason to talk about it and right now they don't have one. Maybe they will get one.

(5) jdboss1. Thanks for reviewing though I wish you'd accept PM's. Short answer: I was trying to time my international reactions according to what I perceive as accurate in real international situations. You can piss off a nation pretty quickly, but trying to cross the English Channel in force too quickly would be a political

nightmare. A logistics and planning nightmare too. At least, that's my reasoning. I could be wrong.

Chapter Twenty-one: Tempting Fate

"Mione?" Harry called out.

"Yes?" She answered while spreading a napkin over her lap. Lunch was being served and those who hadn't partied all night last night were sitting at the dining room table. It was mostly the younger crowd, the teens, though Hermione's parents were present as well. So too were Amelia Bones and their host Alain. Even so, Harry didn't seem to acknowledge anyone's presence other than Hermione. He seemed quite focused, in fact. Nervous even.

"You're good with geography, right?"

Hermione turned her head as if looking at him from a different angle might make his question make more sense.

"I mean- I know I didn't do so well in the subject, but my primary school did teach it and- and I'm sure yours did too. I guess... I guess what I'm asking is if I said a big river's name if you could tell me where it is?"

Hermione wasn't sure where this was going but she did like seeing Harry take his studies seriously. She'd always do her best to answer any study question he may ask.

"Assuming the river is important to the lands it passes through, I'd like to think I could." She answered encouragingly.

"Good." Harry paused. "Good."

He didn't continue immediately but then he didn't move away either. Hermione was getting suspicious. The last time Harry acted this way was back when he wanted to look over one of her essays... back when he and Ron would wait until the very last minute to do the work themselves. Back when they knew she'd get upset and lecture them for it.

"Harry?" She asked.

"So where is... where would you say the river, umm... the River Styx is then?"

How odd, she thought. A ghost is asking a living girl where the River Styx is.

"The River Styx isn't a real river, Harry. It's from Greek mythology. It's the boundary between Earth and Hades, though it's not the only river in Hades. Other important rivers in the underworld include the Acheron, the Cocytus and the Phlegethon." Hermione answered. "May I ask why the interest in Greek mythology?"

"Oh good." Harry didn't seem to catch her return question. "I'm not in trouble then."

"Harry?" Hermione asked again.

"I hope you had a pleasant morning." Harry seemed to ignore Hermione's curious gaze and her continued questioning. "By the way, I happened to meet Albus Dumbledore this morning. Not sure what to think of the whole thing really. I had some words with him- and by the end of it I think I finally figured him out. Completely barmy, that one. Absolutely nutters."

"Harry..." His English love called in a tone that would not be denied. "I thought we agreed that you wouldn't be going to Hogwarts anytime soon..."

"I didn't cross the Channel." Harry soothed. "Honest."

"I'll bite." Segolene interrupted. "Where did you meet him?"

"In a boat crossing the Styx." Harry replied.

Absolute silence followed.

"On a related note," Harry continued, facing Alain for the first time today, "your people should start looking for Headmaster Dumbledore's body if they have the time. He's not in it anymore."

"Harry?"

"Damn!" The ghost shook himself. "I forgot to ask where he died... or how. Oh, well- too late to ask him now."

...

"Harry?"

It wasn't Hermione this time. His brown haired bookworm was struck speechless. The Styx was real?

"Yeah, Victor?" Harry called over the table.

The three living Triwizard champions were all sitting next to each other opposite Hermione, and as such they had a ringside view of the morning's drama. In fact, just about everyone awake and eating breakfast could hear Harry's questions and comments. The four present adults were focused at one end of the table with Alain giving the Grangers a running commentary of Harry's side of things.

"Ve meet over pitch. Not on river of death. Vas dere reason?"

As Harry contemplated his answer and his girlfriend became even more speechless, Cedric piped up. "Hey! You said you were going to have a chat with Vic right before his heart stopped! That's what Vic's talking about, isn't it? Does McGonagall know?"

Every wizard and witch in the room looked at Victor after Cedric's declaration. Every witch save one. Gabby was barely listening. Instead she was eating. She already knew how great Harry was; he went to super magical places with her all the time.

Harry answered Victor. "You were given a choice, Vic. You could move on or you could go back. You chose to come back. Now for Dumbledore- for him coming back wasn't an option. He had a choice: move on if he saw past his own flaws... or..."

But Harry couldn't find the words for what did happen.

"He was a bad man." Gabby supplied, never taking her eyes off her plate full of cold ham slices. "I never liked him. He threw me in a lake and tried to take my name away."

"What she said." Harry thought Gabby summed it up rather well. Maybe it was a bit oversimplified but it was clear and honest.

No one asked for more detail about Dumbledore's fate. They were all afraid he might actually provide it.

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Draco woke up.

He was still in his mother's room at St. Mungo's. The young lord hadn't left her side since reuniting with her, even if it meant sleeping in a chair or going without a proper bath. Mother was worth it.

Draco rubbed the sleep out of his eyes while taking in his surroundings. The room was quite nice considering it was a hospital and not a summer home. Any Malfoy property would put the décor to shame, but when isn't that the case really? On the positive side, the room was warm and inviting and not at all cold or sterile. Even the hospital wing at Hogwarts couldn't say that. There was a plate on the side table with a half eaten sandwich going stale. Ah, yes. Daphne had been by to visit. Was that only yesterday or was it the day before? He couldn't remember any more.

News of Lady Malfoy's injuries spread quickly causing Draco to receive a few visitors, some of them he honestly thought lost at Hogsmeade. Of course, his mother's health was still the lesser news of the day. After all, an attack on the last Minister's widow was less sensational by far than finding Harry Potter's grave robbed and desecrated. If rumors were to be believed, then it was Albus Dumbledore himself who smashed the black stone memorial. The Headmaster was seen approaching Potter's grave just as Draco frantically sounded the alarm about an attack on his home. His aunt Bellatrix traded hexes with aurors before blasting apart several rooms and escaping by portkey. That was also when rumors began to surface, via the ICW oddly enough, that Dumbledore was missing and presumed dead.

Harry Potter. Draco would have to speak to his deceased rival soon. This war... it wasn't what Draco had been led to believe it would be. Father's perfect world, his dream of a pure magical society, had quickly become a nightmare. Father was dead. Mother was... she nearly joined Father. Draco wondered if he would ever wake up.

She would recover, they told him. She would regain near perfect health, they said. At the very least, she should be able to walk and feel her toes and such. Should being the operative word... Mother hadn't been revived since the incident. Waking up early could slow

her recovery time. The scars, however, would never go away completely. The magical assault on her body went too deep. She would always have a jagged web of yellow-brown lines running up from both feet to just past her navel... only charms would hide them. And she would feel them too. Narcissa would always feel them unless she took potions to alleviate the symptoms.

Potter. There was a time when Draco would have focused all his hate on the bane of all dark houses. The Boy-Who-Finally-Died-Like-A-Good-Little-Halfblood. He could have blamed it all on Potter too. Plenty of connections to make. It was Harry Potter's body the Dark Lord wanted. It was Harry Potter's fault that the Dark Lord needed to use Draco's mother as a hostage. Father was dead because of Potter's interference. It was Harry Potter's fault that they hadn't been ruling the whole of the wizarding world on golden thrones for the past fifteen years. It was Harry Potter's fault that a one year old baby could defeat the most feared Dark Lord in history. It was Harry Potter's fault that a nine year old girl crushed the magical elite of the most noble houses of Magical Britain.

Or, at least, Draco would have said it was all Harry Potter's fault once upon a time. Not anymore. In fact, he now considered the idea absurd.

Father taught Draco all he knew about the blood traitors and those of lesser blood. He taught Draco how to hate those who blocked the Malfoys and their pureblood peers from taking their magical birthright... the right to rule. Lucius Malfoy also taught his son how to manipulate, how to scheme and how to plan ahead. He taught Draco about control.

Draco learned. He learned how to spot the puppets and the puppet masters. Who was who and what each of them were doing or could be counted upon to do. He was being taught how to be a puppet master himself. He studied his nemesis, the Gryffindor Golden Boy for years as he learned his craft and that was how he came to a startling conclusion. Harry Potter was a puppet. Yes, he was troublesome and far more powerful than he had any right to be, but he was being controlled by others at every level. And if Harry Potter were just a puppet then surely Albus Dumbledore held the wand behind him. Dumbledore spoke to Potter far more than he did any of his other students short of the Head Boy and Head Girl. Dumbledore controlled the awards and punishments surrounding Potter and his

closest friends with absolute focus... how else could Gryffindor still be competitive in the House Point competitions unless the Potions Master's penalties were being countered? Dumbledore's influence caused Potter to act out in true Gryffindor style, Draco would bet on it. Clearly Potter was a tool under the influence of a powerful man. Draco hated the thought that Potter was a pawn. It meant that he couldn't truly place blame on the former Golden Boy of Gryffindor. Even worse, being Potters arch-nemesis counted for less if to fight him only meant that one was doing battle with a mere pawn.

At least, that was the way of things until Harry died. One might say that his master's control charm had been dispelled. The puppet fell limp. In fact, Draco was more relieved than happy that Dumbledore had lost such a valuable puppet and that Draco would retire from the battle with honor. If only Father hadn't insisted Draco still play his part so long...

And then Potter came back from the dead as a ghost. Draco thought that the puppet had returned at first, but no. It was soon clear that the ghost of Harry Potter was not Dumbledore's to command. If anything, the Hogsmeade Incident proved that Potter now had puppets of his own to play with. Puppets like the Girl-Who-Lived, also known as the Girl-Who-Killed-Everyone or the Angel Gabrielle. So maybe Harry did shoulder some of the blame for Father's death in Hogsmeade, but Draco knew that Lucius was the chief architect of that disaster. And even then the Dark Lord shouldered much of the blame by supplying Black and the Veela.

Draco also learned that being another person's puppet and knowing about it was a horrible feeling. It wasn't so bad when Father was the one in charge... there was an air about the whole affair that spoke of a future when Lucius would step back and allow his son to make his own decisions. It was a grand feeling, to be sure- but then the Dark Lord returned. A monstrous puppet master had come for his puppets, and to Draco's great shock, he was one of those puppets.

There had to be a way. There had to be some path of escape for Draco and for his mother. And after the death of Albus Dumbledore, Draco's options were nearly gone. Only one remained: Potter.

Potter may be dead and he may have pulled free from Dumbledore, but he was still the same headstrong Gryffindor in life that he was in death. All the eye witness accounts and articles and rumors agreed

on that point. If Draco read the situation right, if he said the right things, then Potter could be counted on to either help Draco or perhaps even fight his battles for him.

If Potter didn't help, one of only two things could happen. Draco would either die by the Dark Lord's wand or by Gabrielle's. Yes, damn it to Hell... he was frightfully scared of a nine year old girl. If more wizards had feared her before, they might still be alive today. Father would still- no. She was French and she was a half-breed and she was female and she was tiny. Father would never have taken her seriously.

Draco would not make the same mistakes that lead his father to ruin. He would adapt. He would survive. He would rise to be the greatest puppet master in modern times. After all, a Malfoy bows to no one.

-o\0/o-

The doors to Alain's office opened granting passage to a ghost.

"Thank you for coming to see me, Harry. I have something important to tell you."

The man stood and walked around the side of his desk. Harry, due to his frequent visits to French Ministry offices and the need not to scare security wizards, closed the door behind him.

"Is this about Dumbledore, Alain? They find him yet?" Harry stopped and asked.

"No, Mister Potter." Amelia Bones called from one of the nearby seats. She stood and turned to Harry as Alain did. "But what we have to say is no less serious."

She seemed to gather herself before continuing on. It may have had something to do with seeing a ghost that opens and closes doors when passing through them. A housebroken ghost. Never has she seen the like before.

"You see... the ICW has been slow to release certain details about Albus Dumbledore's disappearance in the hopes of settling the issue quickly, only, there are some details that are bound to come out soon... details that are common rumor in Britain now but have not

spread any further as of yet. Sadly, I must inform you that this all relates to you."

Harry drifted back a pace or two. "But I've been in France the whole time. I haven't even come within sight of the Channel since Christmas Eve."

"No one claims to have seen you, Harry." Alain interrupted. "If you were alive, I would ask you to sit down for this..."

"What? Is someone else hurt? Neville? One of the Weasleys?" Harry jerked back and forth more energetically. If one of his friends were in trouble...

"No one is injured, Harry, but..." Alain continued. "Your grave was desecrated."

"My... what?"

"Someone attacked your memorial, Mister Potter." Amelia added. She could see that Alain was having trouble. The man could not look Harry in the eye. His feelings for Harry were getting in the way. "The stone face was broken and removed. The interior was cursed heavily. Your body is... is unaccounted for. Albus Dumbledore was the last person seen near your memorial though we are not certain if is he is to blame. He was seen near the time you reported his death. I am afraid to say that we are at a loss to explain things at the moment."

"I... I see." He didn't, but he said what was expected. "If Albus had done it, he would have said something to me... but he didn't. I..."

"Don't worry, Harry." Alain said with new purpose. "We haven't stopped investigating. In fact, this is a rather high priority case for the ICW as there are many dark magics that can be performed with the aid of a body."

Harry made a worried face causing Alain to try harder to sooth the uneasy spirit.

"I don't mean to upset you, son," It was a slip of the tongue, but no one complained, "but you need to be aware of the possibilities. Do you know what inferi are?"

"They're like zombies aren't they?" Harry asked.

Amelia lifted one eyebrow at his response, but Alain knew what Harry meant. "That is what the non-magical world calls them, yes. They are the re-animated bodies of the dead and they can be devastating- not just physically but emotionally as well."

Suddenly, Harry could see where this conversation was heading. "You think Voldemort might turn me into a zombie then? Set me loose in Diagon Alley or something? Bet Skeeter would love that..."

"It is possible." Alain hedged, closely watching Harry's reaction. "It is also possible that he might use your hair in a potion to assume your form. There are rituals that would curse all of your blood relatives too. He could even try to summon your spirit to him, but I wouldn't be too worried on that count. You did escape from Hogwarts under similar conditions."

The young ghost failed to show any distress at what may come to pass. He only looked thoughtful.

Alain continued. "This problem is the very reason most magicals are cremated upon death. It's a simple defensive measure which protects any surviving family members. I remember being quite surprised that you were buried without cremation... you seemed such an obvious target for this kind of attack... but Headmaster Dumbledore assured everyone that you and your relatives would have preferred the more muggle practice of burial."

"Dumbledore again. Perhaps I should thank whoever stole me. I'm finally free of the old man's influence. Free of his 'protections'." Harry remembered the original subject and frowned. "I only got out of Hogwarts because Sirius died. His death called to me. Luckily they waited a few minutes to execute Nathalie... I wouldn't have been able to get to her in time if they lit both pyres together. I'd rather not have to rely on something like that happening again to breach Voldemort's wards."

Harry almost said something about calling Gabby, but then he rather hoped that everyone would forget he did that.

"Would you mind explaining that, Harry? Why someone had to die for you to escape?" Alain asked.

Harry could see that Madam Bones was just as interested in the answer as Alain was. Looking back, he remembered that she was in the room when Vic and Ced called him out on his connection to near death experiences. Harry felt that he had been lucky then; his audience was too spooked to push him for more detail. Apparently his grace period was over. He should have planned for this.

"One of these days, I'm going to say something and Death itself is going to step out of a shadow and smack me over the head, but as it hasn't happened yet I think I can answer you without getting in trouble for it. This time, anyway." Harry mused aloud. "I'm not entirely sure of the details myself. It could be that this is the price I pay for hanging around the living when I'm not one of them anymore. If that isn't the case than I'm not really sure why it happens, but I will say that I've been drafted more than once to help ferry spirits over to the Other Side... or to send them back for a good enough reason. You both heard me admit to doing this for Vic over the breakfast table."

"You did mention the river Styx..." Alain prodded.

"Dumbledore was the passenger," Harry returned, "I was the boatman."

"So when Sirius Black died, you breached Hogwarts wards to help him move on."

"Wards can keep a ghost in or out of a room well enough most of the time but I expect there are forces out there that wizarding magic simply can't overcome. I was called upon to help Sirius and, strong as they are, Hogwarts' wards simply couldn't hold me any longer." Harry concluded before another idea sprang to mind. "Say, Madam Bones..."

"Yes, Mister Potter?" The British witch replied.

"Now that Umbridge and her lot have snuffed it, will Susan and Cedric be returning to Hogwarts? Do you know who the next Headmaster will be?" Harry asked.

"Well," She started, "Susan and Cedric would have to be readmitted to the school. This is normally something that the Headmaster would have to do with the approval of the Board of Governors. Since the Headmaster is dead and so is most of the board, I believe that the power to determine school policy falls to whomever Albus assigned to take over should anything happen to him."

Harry scowled. "As Minerva's been with us since summer, I doubt he'd pick her for the job. Dear God, please don't let it be Snape."

"I'm very well acquainted with the Potions Master's reputation." Amelia said, narrowly avoiding a scowl of her own. "If he is the next Headmaster, then Susan will be given a choice between applying to be readmitted or seeking her fortune in the United States. Salem isn't Hogwarts, but they do have a good reputation."

"She's Hufflepuff." Harry reminded the adults.

Amelia scowled. "Yes, of course. Foul headmaster or no, Susan would want to be with her friends."

"What about Luna?"

Harry's question was more for Alain than Amelia, but she chose to answer first.

"Luna was never expelled as far as I can tell. We may not have control of the Ministry building yet, but I've spoken to some of my former staff and they can't ever remember having a file on the girl. Not even a missing witch report. It's entirely possible that she could waltz right back into Hogwarts and return to class."

"I'd rather she didn't." Harry muttered. He didn't want Luna to leave France at all. She felt like family.

"I know exactly what you mean, son." Alain said with a small smile.

Harry blushed silver and looked away. He definitely heard Alain that time.

-o\0/o-

With one week left before the first day of term, Severus Snape opened his eyes for the first time in nearly three weeks. His mouth tasted foul. His whole body felt terribly weak. Half of his face was covered in bandages that smelled like Longbottom's cauldron. But even with all of that, his attention was elsewhere.

His Dark Mark was burning something fierce. The Dark Lord wanted Severus to appear before him and clearly he wanted it to happen days ago. Damn that Potter brat to the infernal pits of Hell!

Snape pushed off of the bed, ignoring his own body's protests all the while, until he could take stock of himself and pull his wand off of the bedside table. He was half way through searching the immediate area for a pile of fresh clothes when the door to his private suite opened to admit Madam Pomfrey.

"What do you think you are doing?" She chastised. "Return to your bed this instant."

He had no time for such distractions.

"Damn you, woman!" Snape yelled back at the veteran healer. "I've taught classes with worse injuries than this and you know it!"

"Well I never!" Poppy huffed. She always disliked his special relationship with the Headmaster and with school rules, but due to her conditioning she would not stand up to Severus today.

"Where are my clothes?" The Potions Master growled under his bandages. Frustrated by the cloth, he began to rip them off much to Madam Pomfrey's indignation.

"Burned!" That shut him up for a moment. "They were so contaminated that Merlin only knows what could have happened to you had I not removed them even a moment later than I did. You should be thankful your protective clothes worked as well as they did or you would not have survived at all. Your current scars are all due direct potion contamination on exposed skin."

Scars. Severus didn't even know how bad they were and at the moment he'd rather not find out. As bad as potion disfigurements could be it still didn't approach the suffering a disappointed Dark Lord could bestow upon him. Severus would control himself until the

day came that he came face to face with that damn spirit again. For revenge, Severus would even follow Potter through the gates of hell... assuming he hasn't already earned that trip several times over.

Cursing loudly and ignoring the woman behind him that just wouldn't shut up, the Slytherin transfigured his medical gown into a robe just heavy enough to cover everything short of his neck. With hospital slippers on his feet, he swept out of the wing and into a warped parody of his life.

Two ICW uniformed witches were walking past, Italian phrases flying back and forth between them as they moved deeper into the castle.

"That's what I've been trying to tell you!" Poppy shouted at Snape's back, hands on her hips. "So much has changed since you last entered my care!"

"What lunacy is this?" The greasy haired wizard turned and hissed at her. "Where is the Headmaster?"

Poppy was experienced enough to hide her reaction to his wounds. Really, they weren't nearly as bad as they were that first day. He at least had a full covering of skin which wasn't something she could say about his first night in her care. And if he weren't already a wretched confirmed bachelor, she would have placed his loss of physical attractiveness at 'moderate' rather than 'complete'. No real loss when you factor in his personality.

"Headmaster Dumbledore is missing." For the first time, Poppy looked at Severus with something other than righteous anger. She was sad.

"He's been missing for three days. There are rumors..." She paused to steady her breathing. "There are rumors that he's already dead. The ICW search parties do not expect to find him alive."

Severus glared at the witch. She had no idea how momentous this news could be. "And the ICW witches? Is gossiping in the hall a new dowsing technique that I have yet to be made aware of?"

"You have missed so much Professor Snape. You remember Mister Potter being detained within the castle, do you not?"

Snape only sneered. It was answer enough.

"After your incident, Sirius Black and his Veela lover were imprisoned, tried and sentenced to be executed in the center of Hogsmeade."

As the healer took in another breath, the greasy haired wizard fought down a smile. Even for such wonderful news as Blacks death he could not smile until a grave had been found and swiftly desecrated.

"On Christmas Eve, Sirius Black was burned at the stake-" Okay, he nearly smiled at that. "but when his lover's fagot was lit, Gabrielle Delacour appeared and banished the fires, sparing the woman her life in the process."

Snape was about to interrupt when Poppy ignored his open mouth to continue the tale. "How could this be, you say? She is a light creature so great and pure that even a phoenix pales in comparison to her. An angel, Severus, straight out of the muggle Testaments. Seems like they remember more magical lore than we do sometimes- but I digress; that is not the end of things. Not at all."

Snape rolled his eyes with 'get on with it' clearly radiating out of his whole person.

"The crowds. The Ministry. Minster Malfoy himself. She incinerated them. She killed them all and saved her Veela friend, killing over one thousand pureblood wizards and witches and burning Hogsmeade to the ground."

Severus Snape was known for being a pasty white skinned man, but his paled skin was nearly vampiric at this news. Such power. Not even the Dark Lord could claim to equal it. By Circe, what had transpired while he was unconscious?

"She then came to Hogwarts and challenged Albus. She claimed he had her wand and she fought him in the middle of the Great Hall until he gave it back."

Perhaps this mess could be salvaged after all. "Did he lock her in his quarters then? I'll need to see the little bra-"

"You misunderstand me, Severus." Poppy cut in. "She beat him. She beat Albus Dumbledore in a magical duel in front of dozens of witnesses and forced him to trade wands with her."

As if he weren't already miserable enough, Severus would have to take a headache potion in short order.

"And the ICW witches?" He asked.

"After Hogsmeade, the ICW entered the British Isles to prevent disorder." Almost against her will, the healer glanced down to his forearm. The marked one. "There are reports of dark wizards having taken over the ministry building. All floo travel has stopped. Now... are you going to return to your bed and read my old newspapers or are you going to head out like an angry Gryffindor?"

Severus huffed and began his trek to the dungeons. He needed his Death Eater regalia. Even if the world has been turned upside-down he couldn't keep his dark master waiting any longer.

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Visual conditions were poor. This was not unusual in the North Sea off Scotland's northern coast at this time of year. Sunset would have been an hour ago had there ever been a break in the cloud cover. The water was choppy and the air was cold enough to require deicing abovedeck on occasion unless a vessel was properly charmed as the Valkyrie was.

"Captain Allinder."

The Old Man turned from his review of the sonar displays and faced his communications officer.

"Communications with the Ornen are getting spotty. The last transmission didn't make any sense."

"Anything indicating they found her?" The captain asked.

"No signs of the sea dragon, Sir." His subordinate replied.

Allinder looked down to the paper chart in his hands and reviewed their progress so far. Two tight twisting lines etched a search pattern

over twenty-four hundred square kilometers of open sea not far off Aberdeenshire, but they were still less than half way through the exercise. A 'Nessie' was loose again.

Chasing sea dragons through the North Sea wasn't quite as exciting as some of their missions were known to be, but there would be hell to pay if a pregnant sea dragon escaped from their reserve in Loch Ness. There were far too few of them alive today to risk a even single clutch in their original nesting grounds at Scapa Flow. Open waters meant that natural predators could get to the young and believe it or not there were some sea creatures that new how to hunt baby sea dragons, ergo, the scaly pregnant leviathan needed to be taken home and tucked into bed.

Captain Allinder knew from experience that sea dragons were rather good at evading human vessels, and so wasn't disappointed by their lack of progress just yet. What did concern him was the Ornen. He knew that ship. He knew the Captain. He knew his fellow sea dog was a logical man. A good man.

"Equipment malfunction?" Allinder asked the communications officer.

"Not likely, sir. Transmissions are clear and free of static. It's what they said that seems off."

"How so?"

The man looked troubled for a moment before replying. "He seemed to be crying sir. Begging for I'm not sure what."

Captain Allinder moved back in front of the main navigation console. At the moment, all non-magical equipment was fully functional and he could track the Valkyrie's sister ship on a glass monitor that held all pertinent navigational data as well as suspected sea dragon 'sightings' from the last five days.

"Ornen's not following her search pattern anymore... she's heading due north..." Allinder muttered to himself. "She hasn't changed course in over an hour."

Something was wrong. Allinder tried to push a wave of depression and disappointment back into the recesses of his mind, he needed a clear head. Unfortunately, the old Swedish seaman was going to

discover the Ornan's problem far sooner than expected. His eyes came up in surprise as a white light flashed past the bridge just ahead of him.

A patronus.

"Dementors on the forecastle!" A seaman on watch along the port bridge deck yelled. "Our ship is under attack!"

"Alarm!" The captain screamed as he looked through the bridge's windows with binoculars in hand.

"Sonus." The communications officer called with a wand to his throat. "General quarters! General quarters! Dementors abovedeck! All crewmen head below deck and seal all hatches. All wizards capable of a patronus are to cast immediately. This is not a drill!"

Allinder focused his binoculars on the forecastle as the crewman who cast that first patronus jumped through a side hatch into the bridge. Both port and starboard hatches were shut immediately afterwards. Down on the ship's bow, between anchor chains and the forward battery, two men were being hunted by a over a dozen floating cloaked soul suckers.

"Mother of God, no..."

Allinder dropped his binoculars and focused. He now understood what happened to the Ornen. He also understood why he was feeling so depressed for the past half hour. With new resolve, the Old Man drew forth his greatest joy: An image of a rosy cheeked infant, the newest Allinder, born to his daughter-in-law not four months ago.

"Expecto Patronum!" He bellowed.

With a flash, a glowing white seagull shot through the forward window and right for the nearest dementor. He only prayed that it would be enough.

Near the Valkyrie's bow, two able bodied seamen were fast running out of energy. Hope was nowhere in sight for the men, nor happiness nor joy. More dementors joined the group with every passing second. Both men were cut off from escape as the soul

eaters were smart enough to get between their meals and the only ship's hatch nearby- and even that hatch was closed and locked down soon after the alarm was given. They were trapped. Three patronus lights shot about the forecastle, but each could only chase one or two dementors away. Sadly there were far more dementors than there were patronuses.

"Fucking beasts!" Yelled the one seaman who still had energy enough to speak.

Enough to speak but not enough to look for or pick up his wand which was now hidden in the shadows. He frantically moved further towards the Valkyrie's bow in an effort to escape.

"Bastards! You..."

It was too horrible to watch. Even as his own worst nightmares were filling his ears and eyes, his mate, a man that he had played cards with and shared drinks with for decades, was being pulled free of the deck by fiends. The man was limp and unresisting. In mere seconds, he would be soulless.

"No!"

There was only one option. It wasn't hope of rescue; it was just a less horrible end than what his mate was falling to even now.

"Better my soul to Davy Jones than to the likes of you..." The sailor moaned before throwing himself overboard.

He fell weightless through the void disappearing in the churning waters just in front of the prow. One dementor tried to follow but the creatures were not capable of passing through water. It was small consolation for the seaman never resurfaced after his journey under the hull of the ship. Davy Jones took what was his.

As Captain Allinder and his crew weathered demonic assault, a great migration was happening in the clouds overhead. Dementors by the hundreds were heading to the southwest. After careful work by a band of dark wizards loyal to the Dark Lord, the dementors of Azkaban were once more free of Azkaban's ruins. A desperate warning was sent out by the crew of the Valkyrie and Captain Allinder hoped that someone was listening. He hoped for the alarm

to spread and he prayed for the good people of Scotland not twenty kilometers to the south.

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There were stars in the sky over Marseille, but as was common for most cities the lights at ground level hid much of the night sky from view. This didn't cause the revelers of the old port area any concern as most of them were either gazing into their drinks or into the eyes of their dates for the evening. Vieux Port was, in modern times, both marina and entertainment district with many bars, restaurants and ice cream parlors. Yes, ice cream parlors. The city is known to get quite warm during the summer.

Despite the cool evening, it was an ice cream parlor which hosted the group of young wizards and witches plus their non-magical chaperones for the evening. Daniel and Emma insisted. They were quite sure their girls weren't ready for spirits- that is to say, alcohol. Of course, they didn't leave the safety of the Delacour home for liquor. No. Nice as the maison-forte was, it simply couldn't hold the interests of so many teens for very long. They had to get out, and Marseille was relatively safe... so long as a detachment of aurors looked over the group from the shadows.

There were street performers singing and dancing not far away and the music drew quite the happy crowd. Segolene was feeling frisky enough to grab Cedric and drag him into the dancing crowds. Victor, feeling the need to be more polite, formally asked Hermione if she would like to dance. For her part, Hermione froze up. Harry and Gabby weren't here and she didn't know what they'd have to say about it.

"Vell? Vill you?" He tried again.

"Please do, sister dear..." Luna begged from across the table, "as the younger child, I must wait for you to do all those social things like dancing and dating and marriage before I am to have my turn. Hurry up and dance with him so that I can do the same."

Hermione very much wanted to call Luna out on her comments from Sirius's memorial service, but then she saw that both of her parents were watching. A quick glance back to Luna's eyes made the ex-Gryffindor quite suspicious. Luna wasn't known for puppy dog eyes.

Hermione looked over to read her parents' reactions. Bother. Mum was taking Luna's side. Da was looking the other way, at least.

"I'd be delighted." Hermione relented and held her hand for Vic to take.

Hermione was forced to admit to herself that Victor was a good dancer when he put down the cane. Soon she was smiling and remembering the better parts of the Yule Ball last winter. Victor had been a good partner on that evening as well- until Ron went and spoiled her evening. With a small huff, Hermione dismissed her darker thoughts and went back to having fun.

Ced returned Segolene to her seat only to pick up Fleur between songs. When Hermione and Vic came back to their table Luna shot out of her seat and dragged the large Bulgarian off, no questions asked.

"I find it fascinating," Luna started a minute into their dance, "That the age of consent varies so widely from nation to nation."

Victor had no reply to the unusual icebreaker. They continued dancing for another minute before the dirty blonde spoke up again.

"Did you know that I would have to wait another ten months to take a man to bed were I still living in Britain? Here in France, I am already old enough to do the same and would have been able to do so more than a year ago in your home country. Isn't that odd? The rest of the animal kingdom isn't quite so mixed up; either you are old enough to mate or you are not."

Victor looked down at the girl in his arms. He was a full two heads taller than she and literally more than twice her weight. Why was he the nervous one? Surely he had nothing to be concerned about; she still maintained that look of innocence and wonder that graced her features most of the time.

Back at the table, Segolene was giving pointers to Susan as the ex-Hufflepuff waited for her turn to dance with Cedric. Susan needed to smile more. Susan needed to remember to never lose body contact. Susan desperately needed to unbutton more of her shirt and let that God given talent shine. Two empty seats away, Emma was on the

verge if interfering on moral grounds. Sadly, it would all be academic soon.

"Merde." Segolene muttered. She nudged the witch next to her before continuing. "I'm sorry, Susan, but it looks like you will not be getting your dance with Cedric like we planned."

"What? Why's that?" The strawberry blonde asked. Emma and Daniel wanted to know too.

"Look."

Segolene nodded her head towards a part of the crowd not far from Fleur and Cedric. The two were dancing quite happily in their own little world and didn't see the small group of young men approaching. Maybe Fleur was happy enough that her control was slipping enough for the thrall to build. Maybe they had too much to drink and were looking for a reason to get violent. Maybe Fleur was just that much better looking than any other female in visual range and these boys wanted their turn with her. Whatever the reason, it surely meant bad things for Cedric.

"...so you see," Fleur spoke mid twirl, "the two forts at ze end of ze docks were not built to protect ze people. Louis XIV 'ad zem built to intimidate 'is subjects and keep zem from revolting yet again."

Cedric nodded enthusiastically at his enthusiastic tour guide. He didn't look back at the two stone fortresses... they weren't important. He just liked hearing Fleur's voice and clearly history was near and dear to her heart. He silently swore to spend more time studying history in general and French history in particular.

Tap. Tap. Someone wanted Cedric's attention and they weren't waiting for the end of the song.

Segolene and Susan watched Cedric and Fleur become the center of much male attention. It wasn't a good thing.

"Dear." Emma put her hand on her husband's arm. "Perhaps you should give the boy a hand."

"I don't think that will be necessary." Susan spoke up. One delicate finger pointed to a disturbance on the other side of the crowd.

Victor was cutting a path through the crowd using his heavy build to sweep other dancing couples out of the way. Trailing along behind the quidditch star, a much smaller Luna tried to apologize to those Vic displaced but she was being pulled along so quickly that she couldn't keep a single person in focus for more than a second.

Cedric was not small nor was he weak, but he was outnumbered. One intoxicated asshole shoved his shoulder, spinning him away from the lead asshole. This was supposed to be when Lead Asshole took Cedric by surprise and freed the Fair Damsel to dance or more with her Savior. Didn't happen that way, of course...

"Geeyyyaaaauugghh!" Lead Asshole squeaked out.

That probably meant in English and Bulgarian exactly what it meant in French. It certainly meant that Victor Krum's iron grip crushed Lead Asshole's fist and that he would be needing medical attention soon.

"Leave Ced and Fleur alone!" Krum didn't know if this rabble understood English, but then he had his game face on and his growling was fairly easy to interpret. All of Lead Asshole's pack shied away quickly when they saw their mark wasn't alone and wasn't even their toughest opponent.

The aurors didn't even need to get involved, thank Jeanne for small favors, and the party of witches and wizards didn't allow such roughhousing to upset their plans. Dinner was still at a nice local restaurant, the boys were both bracketed by pretty young witches and everyone had a delightful time. After much prodding, Susan finally flirted enough for Cedric to notice her as more than just a fellow Puff.

On the way back home, Luna expanded on her favored topic of the evening by pointing out to Cedric that Susan would still be old enough to bed without legal repercussions even had they stayed in England. Moral and social repercussions perhaps, but not legal ones.

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"She told him what?" Harry stared at Hermione incredulously.

"That Susan was old enough too... well... have sex with."

Hermione was quite red in the face. So was Harry for that matter. It wasn't a topic that the two ever felt Gryffindor enough to speak of, even here in Gabby's dreams.

"And what did he say?" Harry asked.

Hermione looked down to the grass and wild flowers all around her. They were lounging in a beautiful meadow at the edge of a shallow stream. A soft breeze blew a few strands of hair across her face.

Harry liked making Hermione play with her hair. Wind was useful for that.

"He didn't say anything, Harry. To be honest, I don't see Cedric doing anything about Susan. He's got his heart set on one girl and it won't matter what Fleur and Segolene do to improve Susan's chances..." Hermoine pulled a flower up from its stalk and began to pluck off the petals. "Hufflepuffs are loyal like that."

Harry rolled from his side to his back. As Harry's head was on Hermione's lap, he went from studying her bare feet to studying her face. She was biting her lip, a sign that Hermione was suffering from some nervous tension or other unless he missed his guess.

"And how was Victor?"

No answer. Oh.

"He didn't... he didn't pressure you into anything did he?" Harry asked cautiously. Harry didn't think Krum would do anything of the sort, but then what did he know of dates and older boys?

"No, Harry. He was a complete gentleman." Hermione ran her hands through Harry's messy hair. Even here in the land of dreams, his hair was still untamed.

Harry has been thinking. He's been thinking quite a lot actually, but much of that thinking has been dedicated to Hermione. She's gotten older and she's done it in ways that he hasn't been able to match. In the waking world it didn't really seem such a great difference as the specter almost never had his feet planted on the ground, but here

things were much more noticeable. They weren't all that different height wise before he died, but recently he's been looking up a bit when they stand toe to toe. Hermione was taller. Her hair was more tame than it used to be. She was curvier and her curves were far more enticing than they were only last year. If anything, Harry began to think of Hermione in much the same way as he used to view the Gryffindor chaser line. Pretty. Sexy even. Out of his league. Older.

"D'you... I don't know... you- umn, still like him?"

"Harry." Hermione looked down. God, she was beautiful. "What are you about?"

"Vic's a nice bloke. He fancies you. You could do a lot worse." Harry's sentence ended with a hand over his mouth.

"You stop that right now Harry James Potter." Hermione's eyes bored down into his own with rare heat. "I am quite happy with my current boyfriend. He loves me and I love him and I don't see that changing any time soon."

Harry's jaw moved as if he wanted to respond. Hermione didn't let him.

"I have faith in you Harry. I lost faith in Father Christmas when I was seven. I lost faith in my peers when I was eight; when no one would befriend the frizzy-haired teacher's pet bookworm. I've lost faith in a great many things since I turned eleven. But you know what? I've never lost faith in you. I never will lose faith in you."

By the time Hermione stopped to breathe, she was whispering and her face was close enough to his to feel each other drawing breath. When next she removed her hand, he didn't move to speak. She bent down enough to plant one soft, delicate kiss upon his lips before speaking again.

"Please don't lose faith in me."

Harry wanted to cry. How could he ever be worthy of the girl whose lap he rested in? How could he ever reward her for her faith and devotion? He tried to set her free yet she would have none of it.

Harry's voice was raw when he did reply. "I won't."

Harry watched the brown haired angel hovering above him lower a finger to his face. What was she doing? One perfect digit slid over the skin at the corner of his eye before pulling back with a single stolen tear. Oh. It would seem that he did cry after all.

Harry watched curiously as Hermione smiled at the tear she had captured. Her finger soon found its way into her mouth where she drank in the taste of his emotions. Her smile went from warm to mischievous.

"Say, Harry..." She cooed a little too sweetly. "Where is Gabby right now?"

He didn't need to look around; here in Gabby's dreams Harry really was omniscient.

"She's nodding off under a willow downstream." He smirked. "The shade and the breeze got her. She won't wake up again unless we bring her out of it on purpose."

Hermione's mischievous smile turned into a wide grin.

"Well, Mister Potter... it would seem that you and I have just had a bit of a spat and that we've made up as well..." Harry's eyes widened when he felt 'Mione's left hand slide under his head and lift it up. "And as we are boyfriend and girlfriend, well, the rules about such things clearly state what must transpire next."

Harry would have asked what that next step was, but by then the witch had her mouth on his. What was he going to ask again? Er... nevermind.

That night Hermione and Harry took their relationship much further than it had ever gone before. There was still a line that neither was quite ready to cross, but on the near side of that line dwelled many things that the two had not done before and that were completely brilliant. It would appear that Sirius Black's last letter was beginning to work its nefarious ways on dear Miss Granger.

One hundred meters downstream, a perfect little angel fell asleep. She slipped into a deeper level of dream where consciousness and logic fell to instinct and emotion, where her bond to Harry was a river,

broad and deep. Gabby knelt at the banks to drink a double handful of love. She played with creatures that even Luna would have boggled at. She frolicked in paradise.

Don't tell Gabby that Heaven isn't real. She knows better. She goes there lots and lots.

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"Enter." A raspy voice commanded.

Severus Snape stood in the middle of an upper hallway in Riddle Manor. It was the logical choice. Malfoy's estate was now lost to the Dark Lord, not that he truly cared for the luxuries Malfoy was accustomed to. Such things made one soft. The Dark Lord turned away from luxury to gain secrecy and protective warding not found elsewhere, a fair trade considering how delicate the Dark Lord's newest acquisition could be. The corpse of the child savior was a great prize. One to be savored. One that could, if properly utilized, shape the history of the magical world... perhaps even the muggle world as well.

Severus straightened his back and pushed through the door. What he discovered on the other side was more than a little disturbing.

Potter's body was lying on a great stone pedestal, one transfigured from a bed that once filled the room. Harry's body was fully exposed, not one stitch of cloth remained to preserve his modesty. It was necessary as there was work to be done.

The Potions Master's eyes briefly fell on the boy's raw looking lightning bolt shaped scar before moving on to the puncture wound on his chest. It was an X pattern, one that seemed half again as large as the lightning bolt yet at the same time it was far less raw and irritated. It looked partially healed. Perhaps Dumbledore and Maxime made some small progress on the brat's corpse before giving up. There were other marks and nicks, Potter seemed unable to take care of himself in life, but on the whole the body was in good condition. Especially so for having been entombed underground for half a year.

"Professor Snape." His host called. "It is good to see you out of Madam Pomfrey's care again."

"Thank you, My Lord." Severus returned with a deep bow. "I deeply regret not being able to answer your call sooner but Potter's attempt on my life was nearly successful, and when I did leave the hospital wing... well... I've clearly missed a great many important events."

Voldemort actually laughed at Snape's reply. "It is for the best. No doubt you would have been in the front row at Black's trial and would have perished along with the rest."

Severus wanted to believe that he could have made some sort of difference, but then he still knew nothing of how Potter and that little half-breed managed to do whatever it was that they did. Anger boiling over, he began to glare at the corpse on the pedestal.

"Careful, Potions Master." Voldemort growled. "Do not allow your hate for the boy to influence your work. Too much depends on this."

Snape bowed penitently towards his Master. "I swear on my magic that I shall be detached and professional at all times when working with the body, My Lord."

"See to it that you are. There shall be no mistakes due to haste. You will take your time. A full lunar cycle... two if necessary." The Dark Lord turned from his servant to the lifeless body between them. "The girl is an added layer of complexity and we must account for her. But when we succeed..." Voldemort let out a low chuckle. "When they see that their victories are hollow... when I take my proper place above the weaklings... on that day, those who opposed me shall suffer."

"And until then, My Lord?" Severus asked.

"Maintain your place at the castle unless you are needed here to deal with our 'guest'. Do not concern yourself with my other followers for they have their own parts to play. Most will not be with me when next we meet."

"And when we do meet again, My Lord?"

"Do not reveal your allegiance to me. Even should we meet in pitched battle, you shall attack me without restraint."

Severus bowed again. "As you command."

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Portsoy. It was a modest burg on the northern coast of Scotland. A quiet place known mostly for traditional crafts and fishing... the town hosts a traditional boating festival every year. Unfortunately for the locals, non-magical every one, they would wake up on the seventh of January to tragic news.

Crews heading out for a day's work at the local quarry called for emergency services almost as soon as they arrived on sight; a shift manager and the night watchman were both found unresponsive just outside the main building. An industrial accident was the first suspect though none of the toxic chemicals on sight were found to be leaking and no airborne agents were detected. That afternoon, the case became far more serious when a young couple was found in the same condition as the two quarry employees. The couple was touring the ruins of Boyne Castle just up the hill and appeared to have fallen unconscious without any signs of struggle.

It would fast become a local news sensation with speculation running from industrial espionage and illicit drug running to demonic infestation and vengeful castle spirits. News spread quickly through Scotland and made BBC broadcasts that day. At that point, anyone watching for signs of unexplained tragedy was sure to hear about it.

And they did.

After receiving broken frantic transmissions from the Valkyrie just the day before, ICW officers in charge of Magical Britain's occupation were looking for just that kind of news story. They wanted to know where the Dementors were and where they could be counted on to turn up next. Special squads of patronus casting aurors were being formed to hunt the bastards down, hopefully to push them offshore again. The old control devices taken from Azkaban in the ICW raid were distributed hoping that they would still work. Even trapping them in caves or heavily constructed buildings would be considered progress. The alternative would be catastrophic.

If only the muggles knew just how close they were to the truth with their cries of demonic infestation. This was grave news indeed.

End Chapter

Chapter Notes:

Descriptions of northern Scotland and Marseille as found in this chapter are courtesy of Google Earth, Wikipedia and a handful of tourist websites. I have not been there myself and therefore may be getting bad information from the internet. I wouldn't know myself.

Chapter Twenty-two: Back To School

The garden was getting a bit noisy. Lots of last minute hugs and kisses were to be had as the Delacour family bastion was shedding most of its winter guests in one fell swoop. Yes there were smiles, but those smiles merely covered the sadness. In these troubled times, the friends and family of the Delacour family could not be certain when the next reunion would be held.

Gabrielle stood at one end of the group wearing her light blue Joliebatons Academie uniform. She at least would be back this afternoon. Her mother fussed over her hat; no matter how many times Gabby got herself ready in the morning her hat never sat quite right. Gabby bit her lip to hold back the giggles as her mother re-aligned the curved blue headpiece yet again. Gabby's perfect record playing 'Make Momma Touch My Hat' was extended one more day.

Only two steps away, Fleur and Segolene watched Miss Jones direct the Delacour house elves in the final packing and shrinking of all of their equipment for the next stage of their research trip. If all went well, they would pass on a few messages from Madame Mitterrand to other important Veela across the continent and still reach the temple in time for Gabby to make her weekend trip to Angel School on Saturday.

Victor also watched Marion work. The young Bulgarian wizard would be accompanying the girls as far as Ukraine, thus extending his vacation, while also helping add to extra security to the ladies' trip. He carefully watched each trunk, sack and case in an attempt to memorize the luggage train. He hoped to be able to tell if any unauthorized items found their way in during the trip. Why? Unfortunately, he had a rather unpleasant experience due to World Cup fame: a stalker managed to slip locator charm enchanted pebbles into his equipment bags ensuring a long string of unpleasant encounters which lasted almost three months. Crazy bitch. At least she wasn't crazy in a dangerous way and she did teach him the value of rigid security.

Another small group standing in the garden was comprised of young English students. Hermione stood in the middle of the group, a visual anchor in her light blue Beauxbatons uniform. As this was the first time the Susan and Cedric has seen her wear it she received

several flattering compliments from those two. Luna simply stated that she wanted one of her own.

"I told you 'Mione looks good in it." Harry commented as he floated between Hermione and the others.

"Har-ryyyyy..." Hermione sang, blushing scarlet at Harry's words and the words of agreement pouring in.

"Yes," Susan added, "this is a lot better than boring black cloaks or a striped scarf wound about your neck."

"It's not too late, Susan." Luna said as she ran her fingers along Hermione's newly re-braided hair. "There are potions that help one learn languages at a blistering pace. The ingredients are tricky to obtain though. You need the blood of someone who already knows the language you are interested in."

"Where did you hear about that?" Susan hissed, quickly looking to see if any adults were listening in.

Hermione looked up with interest. Susan noticed.

"Blood magic." The strawberry blonde stage whispered. "Nasty stuff."

"It's part whit sharpening potion and part memory enhancing potion with a bit of blood from a native speaker added in." Luna countered. "No ritual heart eating or naked dancing under the harvest moon or anything of the sort."

"I'm not about to take a dark potion, Luna." The youngest Bones replied without looking away from 'Mione's uniform.

"Surely it's not as bad as all that, is it?" Hermione played dumb hoping to hear more of Susan's take on the subject of blood magic.

"It's illegal and the scandal would ruin my family anyway even if it wasn't." Susan insisted. "Where did you hear about it anyway?"

Luna looked to Hermione. 'Lily Potter's Journal' was left unsaid but acknowledged. She turned back to Susan, looked the girl in the eyes and lied. "Restricted section of the library. I was doing research on

wizards who knew more languages than was practical when I came across an entry on the blood magic potion. I have a theory explaining Bartemius Crouch Senior's knowledge of not less than one hundred and forty languages, but I am rather fearful of what the Illuminati might do to me should I spread the word too widely."

"Of- of course..." Susan replied faintly. Illuminati. Right. Whatever.

"I'm quite sure that Mister Crouch used a perfectly legal Ministry approved method to learn all those languages he knows... errr, knew. He's dead now, isn't he?" Hermione said, now hoping to shut down this topic of conversation.

That didn't stop her from looking over her shoulder at Segolene and wondering if the girl would be willing to donate. Hermione's French was decent, but the twin lures of fluency and light blood magic were calling to her. Well, she could try Apoll- but no, using Veela blood in a potion for non-Veela could not end well. It would be Segolene or no one.

"So you three are going back to Hogwarts then?" She dodged.

Susan and Cedric nodded. Luna smiled dreamily before replying.

"We won't be gone overlong. I'll be wearing Beauxbaton's blue before you can say Stubby Boardman..."

Susan turned at that. "But I thought your par- Mister and Misses Granger agreed that Hogwarts would be best for you?"

Luna lost a bit of her smile but only a bit.

"Mummy and Daddy Granger want their girls to go to the same school, but then I'd be terribly far behind in some classes that are compulsory in France yet ignored at Hogwarts and I still don't know French. Salem is too far away, so it's Hogwarts for me until something changes."

"But," Cedric interrupted, "I thought you just said that you would be a Beauxbatons student faster than you can say 'Stubby Boardman'."

"I was interrupted." Luna countered. "I was going to add 'one-hundred and fifty thousand times with breaks for sleeping, eating and such' at the end of my sentence."

"Oh." Cedric replied.

"Quite." Said Luna.

The small pause in their chat died when a small blue and silver-blond blur latched onto Luna's side.

"You have to come back! All my sisters are leaving me..." Gabby moaned for maximum effect.

Luna hugged Little Angel right back and dropped a kiss on her forehead. "We'll have another club meeting soon. Just you wait and see."

"Okay," Gabby returned, "but you promise... right?"

Luna nodded. Gabby smiled and gave the once and future Ravenclaw one more hug before jumping back. Soon, Susan and Cedric had also received Gabby hugs too. Only Hermione had yet to be hugged. That couldn't last. Mindful of the two spotless school uniforms, Hermione knelt down to Gabby's level before hugging the smaller girl for all she was worth.

"Be safe Little Angel. Have fun, be a good girl and listen to Harry." Hermione pleaded. "It's a dangerous world out there."

"I will." Not that Gabby needed prompting to listen to Harry.

"Little Angel." Apolline called softly from behind the two. "Come to me, dear. You can't be late for school."

Gabby hopped back from Hermione with a quick "Bye!" and quickly ran around to give goodbye hugs to anyone she felt deserved them. One very rushed minute later, Gabby took the portkey her Momma was holding for her and vanished off to school.

Only a few minutes later, it was Hermione's turn. She got her hugs, kisses and tears in with everyone as well as a promise from Krum, on his honor, that he would defend Fleur, Segolene and Marion from

all possible dangers for as long as he was with them. Hermione bussed his cheeks for that. She then turned around and gave Harry permission to go back to England. Just in case.

The exploration party left shortly after Hermione did. It would be a long trip even with portkeys as there were magical customs offices at every national border. Overuse of long distance portkeys was dangerous anyway, even if they didn't exhaust the traveler's personal magic. A magical form of motion or travel sickness has been known to occur during portkey abuse. Depending on local customs officials, the group hoped to fall asleep in Athens that night thought Rome may be as far as they get.

Soon, Apolline and Harry were seeing off their English travelers. The Bones family would be returning to their family manor where Misses McGonagall would join them for lunch. After that? Off to Hogwarts.

"Well, off you go then." Harry called after things quieted down some. Amelia was beginning to look antsy.

"Harry," Luna returned, "why don't you come with us?"

"You think?"

She nodded confidently. "It's only fair that we all go back at the same time. After all, I may need your help to find my shoes come morning. They do so like to disappear at the oddest times of day."

"Right." Cedric practically growled from beside her. "Luna, I want you to tell me how the other Claws treat you. If she hasn't cleaned up her act, I really will hit Cho again."

Minerva and her student charges activated their portkey at nearly the same time as a shiny red steam engine pulled out of Kings Cross Station. Enchanted as the Hogwarts Express was, it still couldn't outpace a portkey and the old Scot's group would reach the school many hours before the main student body. Well, they would beat whatever portion of the student body chose to risk the train ride. It did seem a likely target of Dark Wizardry and more than a few would shy away from the potential danger. Dangerous trip or no, the school itself was a well known bastion for light as well as a well defended fortress so long as the ICW maintained their presence in Scotland. For that reason, most children would still end up attending.

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Harry Potter never liked taking portkeys. Unfortunately for Cedric, Harry liked them even less when he was possessing the person actually riding the portkey. The results were rather distasteful. Unless it was Gabby. Special circumstances, there.

Minerva tut-tutted even while banishing the sick 'Cedric' left on the grass at their portkey landing site. "Perhaps you should leave Mister Diggory's body, Mister Potter."

The ghost quickly complied by popping out of the unsteady Triwizard Champion and floating down to ground level.

"I am not doing that again." Cedric muttered as he struggled to stand. "Next time you can travel under your own power, Harry."

"No worries." Harry added. "I may miss parts of being alive, but that is definitely not one of them."

"If Harry had come on his own then we wouldn't be traveling together, now would we?" The former deputy headmistress reminded both boys. "I'm not about to scour Hogwarts grounds for one of us just to get around a little portkey sickness. Now... ready, gentlemen?"

The boys, both living and dead nodded.

Soon enough, Minerva and Amelia were shepherding their flock up to the gates of Hogwarts Castle and one of many new security checkpoints. From the front gates, they were taken in to a side room just off the entrance hall where their identities could be verified and their business confirmed. They were also told that the right hand side of the third floor corridor was forbidden to unauthorized personnel. No, it wasn't a cerberus; it was the current ICW command center within Hogwarts.

This was Amelia's stop. Things being what they were, the former D.M.L.E. head was well on her way to regaining her former position if not becoming the new Minister for Magic outright. Only a handful of low level Ministry officials survived Hogsmeade- the 'unlucky' and

unconnected holiday skeleton crew mostly- and Amelia had enough experience and former pay-grade to outrank them all.

Minerva and her young charges left Amelia and went off in search of the 'headmaster' in his tower office. He wasn't there. Hadn't bothered to tell anyone where he was either. The git. After asking around, they discovered that Headmaster Snape had spent most of his time since waking either out of the castle or in his own dungeon office.

After half an hour of walking about just to track the man down, the group finally stood outside the door to his old Slytherin Head of House quarters. This time, they knew he was there; a portrait near his door was at least willing to answer McGonagall's query to that effect.

Suddenly, Harry began to wonder exactly what his purpose was supposed to be on the other side of that door. He had come close to killing Snape the last time the two were this close together.

"On second thought," He blurted out, "perhaps my time would be better spent elsewhere."

"Please, Harry." Luna nearly jumped at what he said. Apparently, he wasn't the only nervous one in the group. "I need to be here but I can't do it without you."

Her eyes bore into his. Harry was stunned at how much fear he saw in those silver-grey orbs.

"Are you sure?" He returned. "I can take you back to France. You only have to say the word and-"

"No!- no thank you, Harry." Luna tried to smile for him. Really, she did. "I really must do this, but I do need you. Who will be there to save me if I should need saving again?"

Harry opened his mouth, but Cedric beat him to it. "I will."

Both ghost and girl turned to the once and future Hufflepuff. Two others did as well.

"You have two champions now, Luna. Promise." Cedric called.

"And me!" Susan blurted out. "We're friends now, Luna. Nothing will ever change that!"

"It is so very wonderful to have friends." Luna smiled that time. "I begin to wonder how I ever got along without them before."

Oh, dear. Harry couldn't leave her alone now.

"Well, perhaps I can sneak in behind the rest of you... you know... so he doesn't know I'm there." Harry reasoned. "I can watch him for any tricks and such and then we can go back to being one big happy family once we're done with him."

"One big happy family." Luna repeated. "Yes. Just like that."

"Okay, then..." Harry turned to his former Head of House. "Misses McGonagall. If you would please do the honors?"

The old Scot collected herself and knocked on Severus Snape's door. And then they waited. And then they waited some more.

Nothing. Minerva knocked again.

With a soft -pop- a Hogwarts elf appeared in the hall next to them.

"Blinkey is being very sorry Professor Kitty Ma'am, but the Headmaster is not being wanting company at this time."

If the teens had a reaction to Minerva's title as bestowed by Blinkey the house elf, then they kept it well hidden.

"If he is indeed the headmaster of this school as he claims to be, then he will know that any day the children return to school is a day he must be available to discuss school issues anyone who may approach... especially with how eventful the break was. It is a travesty he's even down here today."

"Blinkey is terribly sorry Professor Kitty Ma'am! Blinkey doesn't mean to cause trouble!" Blinkey took his scolding like a proper elf. He bowed and scraped until the chance came to -pop- away in fear of punishment. Not that Professor Kitty Ma'am ever assigned an elf punishment. She just had a glare sometimes...

Once again there was nothing between Minerva and a closed door. She opened it.

"Damn you elf! I said no interruptions!" A very cross and very recognizable voice thundered through the room.

Minerva entered the office with purpose, moving towards the open doorway from which Snape's voice originated. The teens with her entered more cautiously, Harry last of all and moving quickly from cover to cover as to stay out of sight.

"And I'll tell you what I told him!" Minerva shouted back. "The headmaster must be available to deal with school related issues on the day that children return from break. Umbridge is dead. Have you managed to fill the defense position yet? Did you even bother to find a new potions professor?"

An inarticulate grunt came from the next room. Soon enough, Severus Snape strode into the room with a sneer on his half-scarred face and hatred burning deep in his eyes.

"I am still the Potions Master of this school, woman, and I am also the Headmaster now as well. Perhaps if you had not run from these halls like a spoiled child yourself, it might have been you elevated to the lofty position of school head." He glanced quickly between those assembled in front of him. "Now you see the effect a single decision can have on your lives don't you? Let's start with the decision to interrupt my brewing, shall we? Right... the school just lost ninety galleons worth of potions ingredients when your ignorant bleating forced my hand."

"And what potion would the school hospital need that costs ninety galleons per batch? I know of no such stock." Minerva replied.

"You are not a member of my staff, madam, and therefore your opinion is of no consequence to me." Severus sneered in return. "Now. What was so important that you would place a financial burden upon the school rather than wait for me to leave my quarters?"

Severus looked again at the group assembled before him. Just behind Minerva, Cedric and Susan stood together, their hands intertwined for mutual support. How typically Hufflepuff of them. Luna was the odd man out... slowly drifting backwards one small step at a time. He could see the fear in her eyes. And... he could also see what they came here for.

"Thinking of returning to class, are we?" The greasy haired man snorted. "You were never excused from attending class to begin with Miss Lovegood. Shall we say ten points and a detention... for every class missed?"

"She was kidnapped and thrown in Azkaban, Severus-" Minerva countered, but she was cut off.

"I care not why she was missing and that's Headmaster Snape to you!" He snapped at Minerva before refocusing on Luna. "You do wish to return to class, do you not?"

Eyes to the floor, she nodded. "I do, Headmaster."

"Well at least someone here knows how to show me proper respect." He turned to the ex-Puffs. "What about you two? What part of 'expelled' do you not understand?"

He got no answer.

"Although..." The wizard continued, his voice silkier and more Slytherin than before. "I'm sure Madam Bones and the elder Mister Diggory would both be very grateful to have the shame of their petulant children's expulsions reversed in exchange for a weighty favor or two. I'll need fresh ingredients for the potion you all just ruined as well. Tuition will have to be paid again, of course, and you shall both be on your very best behaviors or be swiftly expelled a second time. What do you say, Mister Diggory?"

Cedric straightened himself and nodded. "I accept, Headmaster."

"I accept as well, Headmaster Snape." Susan added.

"Ten points from Hufflepuff for speaking out of turn, Miss Bones." Snape sneered in triumph. "And another ten points for the immoral display of affection in front of me. And detention."

Cedric and Susan quickly released their hands and slid an extra pace apart. Minerva's face was red in indignation but there was little she could do short of hexing the man. For good or ill- mostly ill- he was the Headmaster. The house elves clearly recognized him as such.

Perhaps once a new Board of Governors was assembled...

"Now, the lot of you shall get out of my sight." Severus demanded. "Wasting another moment of my time will ruin two more rare and expensive potions. Do your families want to be billed for the expense of re-brewing them as well? After you both are both expelled a second time?"

"We'll be leaving, sir." Cedric replied as he turned on one heel and walked to the door.

Both girls immediately followed him out, though Severus could have sworn he saw something slip behind the Lovegood girl. No matter. They were leaving and that was all that mattered.

"Good day, Headmaster Snape." Minerva said without an ounce of respect in her words. She was the last to turn and leave.

"Are you sure you want to come back to Hogwarts, Luna?" Harry asked as soon as they were clear of that bastard's office.

"I don't want to be here. I have to be here." The troubled girl answered. "I can't say why, not in a way that you will understand or believe."

Cedric and Susan exchanged worried glances. It was a testament to just how troubled Luna was that she didn't even bother naming some creature or other to explain away her actions. She had to stay and they couldn't know why and that was all there was to it. Needless to say, they found no comfort in her words.

"Don't worry, Luna. I'll help you in any way I can." Susan said. Suddenly, she had a wicked thought. "Why, I can think of at least four redheads that would do just about anything for Harry Potter's sister-in-law."

"Harry's what?" Cedric turned to the strawberry blonde next to him. Behind them, Harry mouthed 'my what?'

"Well it's true... sort of." Susan countered. "You remember when Hermione got her 'Mrs. Potter' nickname after his will was read, right? That stuck with a lot of the girls. Now that Luna is legally Hermione's sister, that will carry over some."

"Well if there is one thing those troublesome twins are good for," Minerva spoke up, surprising the teens who had almost forgot she was with them, "it is standing up for Harry and his friends."

The teens all nodded. Ron's best mate. Saved Ginny's life. Played quidditch with the twins. Harry was as close to a Weasley as one could get without having red hair and calling Molly 'Mum'. Even Harry thought so until he became 'adopted' by the Delacours.

"Come along now," Minerva chirped, "we have dormitories to visit and a train to wait for. I dare say shall we shall make quite a spectacle should we wait for your friends on the platform."

"Professor," Susan called. "Are you planning a prank?"

This brought the old Scot to a halt.

"I... I suppose that I am." She looked away. They couldn't tell if she was blushing or not.

"Why I had no idea! Professor Kitty, I'll bet you were quite the prankster in your day, eh?" Harry teased.

"I was no such thing." Minerva snipped before seeming to turn inward in contemplation for a moment. "If you were to ask anyone who knew me at the time, they would say I was a lot like your mother."

"I'd like to hear about that." Harry said seriously. "About your days in Hogwarts and about my mother if you'd allow it."

She looked Harry in the eyes, and all of her sternness seemed to melt away. "Perhaps I can oblige you one day, Harry. After we return to France, though. Now is not the time."

"I can wait." Harry answered Happily. "But for now, I think I should go say hello to Myrtle. Would anyone like to come with me?"

Luna and Susan both replied in the affirmative. The dead witch and her bathroom were a cornerstone in their relationship along with Doctor Harry Potter Sir. Myrtle's weepy reputation meant nothing to them anymore. Cedric agreed reluctantly. He wanted to keep watch over the girls... but spending time in a girls' loo? Still, Myrtle was a friend of Harry and that meant something. Even Minerva agreed. Perhaps she would finally get the full story about Myrtle and young Ginny and the Chamber out of Harry.

A story for a story. It's only fair.

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Gabby sat down between Aimee and Gigi. She focused on the table she was at and the lunch in her hands and tried hard to keep the tears from coming.

The other students, they were doing it again. The stares. The whispering. The random demanding questions when Professor Royal and Gabby's two closest friends were away for even the shortest of moments. Absolon was already banished to a chair in the corner. He was even being forced to eat lunch in the professor's office as she went over classwork and ate her salad.

Most recently, another girl in their class tried to demand Gabby to bring her grandmother back from the dead. Gabby was an angel right? Everybody knows that angels can do that kind of stuff. Why was Gabby being so selfish?

That's how the other girl put it anyway.

"The nerve of that girl," Gigi muttered from the seat on Gabby's right, "thinking you can just make people come back like that."

Gabby shuddered. "It doesn't work that way... I don't get to say who goes and who comes back."

Gabby didn't come to school to talk about things like that. She didn't like questions like those. She was beginning to wonder if she could

use the bond to beg Harry to come stay with her for the rest of the day. If so, she hasn't gotten that bit to work yet.

"Don't worry, she's off my list now." Aimee called out from her seat to Gabby's left.

Gigi looked around their co-best friend to eye Aimee with confusion. Aimee looked at the list she had just struck a name from before stuffing it back into her satchel.

"My party invite list. No cards or birthday parties or birthday cake for Annette, not until she says she's sorry anyway."

Gabby did smile at that. At least she still had two good friends. Big Sissy Fleur told her about losing friends, but Gabby always hoped that it wouldn't be so hard. Annette didn't used to be like this either. Annette was a good friend until Gabby began her changes.

Little Angel dropped her head on her desk in a doomed attempt to block out the world around her.

"I wish I were with Harry right now." She said almost too softly to hear. "He's not having any fun right now either."

"What?" Gigi and Aimee both called out at the same time.

Uh, oh. They did hear her after all. Gabby looked up to see her friends faces were a lot closer than they were a few seconds ago.

"Do you really know what he's feeling?" Aimee whispered, trying to be discreet. "Like, right now?"

Gabby looked back and forth between her friends. She then looked around the room. Luckily, no one seemed to be paying any attention to the three right this second. She held out a fist to either side, pinkies extended and hooked.

"Promise you won't tell anyone. Swear it."

"Okay!" Two girls said as one while finishing their half- their thirds- of the magic pinkie swear.

"Well..." Gabby trailed off. What could she say? There were still parts she didn't understand when Harry and the others talked about it. "He and I are... joined."

"You're joined?" Gigi parroted.

"Yeah. Joined. His kiss did more than save my life. It bonded me to him." Gabby added.

"You mean like-" A wide eyed Aimee almost shouted before stopping herself and whispering the next bit. "You mean like married bonded?"

Gabby blushed furiously. Other students were beginning to notice their secret powwow and noise level.

"We're not married." She ground out before switching gears. "It's... I don't know... different. Better even."

"Better than married?" Aimee asked, her voice betraying that she thought such a thing impossible.

"I wish I could be bonded and read someone else's brain with magic." Gigi said with a romantic dreamy look on her face.

Gabby's face fell. "But he's not happy right now. When he's happy it's the best ever, but when he's angry then that's just sad. I don't like Harry being not happy."

"I wonder why he's not happy." Aimee added.

"I don't know." Gabby answered. "But he's not happy."

"I he sad?" Aimee again.

"Noooo..." Gabby mused, her gaze on an untraceable point in the distance. "He's mad. It's like he's trying to put the fear of God into someone."

"Huh." Gigi added intelligently.

Gigi looked off to one side, her attention caught on something new. "Get your stuff. Our professor is coming."

"Attention class!" Professor Royal called over the din of the cafeteria. "It's time to go back to our room. Get all your things together and follow me in a straight line."

"Yes Professor Royal!" The whole class yelled as one.

A little more than one thousand kilometers to the north, Harry Potter was putting the fear of God into someone.

"You know," The transparent Boy-Who-Died started, "I used to think that you were such a nice girl. Honestly, I fancied you for a while..."

Cho Chang smiled a bit at that, but only a bit. This wasn't a proper social call.

"...but then you turned into a right monster at some point when I wasn't paying attention. When did that happen?"

She shrugged her shoulders, her face an even mix of regret and fear.

"It's alright... doesn't matter all that much, does it? Not really. No, what what does matter is how much of a monster you've been to one person." Harry suddenly darted close, their eyes separated by little more than their noses. "A person very close to me."

Cho wanted to step back but ended up flinching instead. Stepping backwards wasn't a good idea. All she could do was stare into Harry's eyes as he glared back. Cho began to get gooseflesh from the intense cold Harry's presence was creating.

"Have you always been like this to Luna? I'm told you bullied her horribly long before a certain Hogsmeade trip."

"L-look, Harry." Cho finally found her voice. "It was just something everyone did. Loon- I mean Luna never complained about anything we did- you'd think that if she really had a problem with it she'd have said something to Professor Flitwick, right?"

"I'm quite sure that Luna did not deserve to go to Azkaban, and to hear Cedric tell it Luna was about to go free until you said something against him. I can believe two Slytherins getting an innocent girl in trouble- not that I intend to let them get away with it either mind you-

but you're a Ravenclaw." Harry's eyes narrowed. "You turned on a member of your own house."

This angered Harry more than anything else Cho could have done. He hated it when those in positions of authority turned on or hurt their own family. It happened far too often in his own life.

"I can understand the whole 'woman scorned' thing with Cedric even if I don't like it, but to condemn Luna to Azkaban, well, I just can't allow you or anyone else the opportunity to do that again."

Cho nodded fervently. "Of course. Won't happen again, Harry. I'll take her under my wing- she won't have to fear from anyone."

Harry stared at her for a moment before answering. "Good." He began to drift back and away.

Cho let out a breath she didn't realize she'd been holding and relaxed her stance by stepping away from Harry.

Uh, oh.

In her relief, she seemed to have forgotten where she was and why she was nervous in the first place. Harry had backed her into one of the open arched windows at the top of the astronomy tower with the help of a few tricky redheads. Her one step away from Harry just happened to be one step out into the open air beyond the window sill. In less than a second, she was in free fall with the Astronomy Tower wall passing by in a blur.

Harry's eyes widened fractionally right before he darted through the stones below him in an intercept course with the falling witch. It was a spectral snitch hunt by Harry to catch his former opposing seeker, a dive that he hoped to have enough talent to pull off.

When Harry pulled out of the stone face, he was still ten meters above the falling Head Girl. He focused on the falling girl the same way he focused on Gabby back when Fawkes was diving to take her to Hogwarts from the Ministry building. Harry shot down faster, far faster than gravity alone could account for had he any mass for gravity to pull on.

The wind stopped howling. The tower stopped falling away. Head Girl Chang fought out of her panic to look at the spectral face staring down at her.

"Yeah, sorry 'bout that." Harry's face took on a ghostly blush. "I got you though, so no harm done."

"F-fine." Cho agreed immediately. She now had a new found respect for Harry's reputation as a saver of maidens. Even if she wasn't technically a maiden anymore. "Can I get down now?"

Harry smiled. "The Head Boy is still asleep upstairs with Gred and Forge. Don't you want to go back up instead?"

Cho shook her head furiously. "No thanks. I'm suddenly quite keen on staying out of towers for a while. The twins can have Marius for all I care- bastard's been eyeing other girls a little to much of late."

Harry snickered as he carried the Head Girl the rest of the way down to open grass. "I'll be staying out of that one, thank you very much."

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Four times forty-four turns clockwise. Three times thirteen turns anti-clockwise. Simmer. Wait.

Severus Snape stepped back from his cauldrons. They were all in sync now and he could afford a few hours away for less important tasks. Tasks like being the Headmaster to a castle full of miserable little brats and dunderheads. Well he had a few lessons that he could teach them... just not the lessons they thought they were there to learn.

Snape stepped into another room and checked his personal potioneering chronometer. According to the brass dials and arms, he was supposed to be back in the castle nearly two and a half hours ago.

Perfect.

The marked Potions Master and school Headmaster took a quick meal and freshened up a bit before pulling on a golden chain that hid just under his shirt. Slowly, the full length of chain was exposed

to the dim light of his personal quarters. When he did have the full chain exposed, a delicate hourglass slipped out of his shirt and caught what little light there was in the room sparkling with unnatural luminescence. A time turner. Three full turns and he was ready to go back to Hogwarts and to the foul little brats that it was his displeasure to deal with as they pretended to learn.

Just as the greasy haired one was about to walk down the main stair heading for the door, he caught sight of a particular room. He stopped.

The pull was just too great.

Slowly yet surely, the man turned and entered the room where the recipient of most of his potions work was lying on a hard stone surface. Single minded focus kept the man's attention on his one goal to the exclusion of all else. He didn't notice the black drapery blocking the window nor did he see the burnt and charred portrait frame which once housed a Black patron of some renown. He ignored the floating red and black candles made from muggle fat as well as the blood red runework adorning the stone pedestal. With great personal effort, he avoided looking overlong at the teenaged body which seemed nearly identical to Snape's childhood nemesis. There were two things within the room that he absolutely had to see.

With trembling fingers, Severus lifted the body's eyelids exposing the orbs beneath to what light the room did have.

Green. Lily's green.

Snape jerked away from the body on the table, rushed out of the room and down the stairs as quickly as his legs could take him.

Damn Potter. If not for that rotten bastard, Lily's green eyes would be there to greet Snape every morning and every night as it was supposed to be. He saw her first. He claimed her first. She was supposed to be his, not Potter's.

Damn that manipulative bastard Dumbledore. Surely Potter would have been content to use the life debt to banish Snape from his family's presence never to meet again. That would have been far preferable to Albus Bloody Dumbledore and his cold hearted engineering. Using the life debt to make Severus a personal

protector and guide to the thrice cursed spawn of Potter, how could Dumbledore do that to him? Truly, the Leader of the Light could be as ruthless as the Dark Lord himself if he deemed the situation grave enough. Thankfully, the little shit went and got himself killed, thus releasing Severus from his lifelong burden.

Damn his own self. Lily was the one light in his miserable life and he cast her away in order to fit in with a social group that he truly didn't belong with in the first place. They were dark, yes, but they were more than that. They were blood purists... and his own blood wasn't exactly pure.

Still, he made his deal with the Devil, and true to form that deal had come back to bite him in the arse with startling speed and ruthlessness. Snape couldn't even celebrate Potter's death properly- either Potters' deaths- knowing Lily was dead due to his actions those many long years ago.

As Severus walked out of Riddle Manor's wards and reached for his portkey to the gates of Hogwarts, he desperately hoped that Lily had done something in her life deserving of eternal damnation. If she didn't, he could never hope to see her face again, for surely his course after death was firmly set.

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Newtonmore was the next town in the Scottish Highlands to become an unfortunate host of the plague known as dementors. In addition to the cold that caused record lows even for a Highland winter, three men traveling on Highland Council business were found dead on the side of the road one morning. They appeared to leave their auto with the intent of taking pictures of the winter scenery yet never reentered the still running vehicle. All three men were found lying on the ground, frozen stiff as the clothes they were wearing were not sufficient for overnight exposure. Aside from the cold, no clues to the reason of their demise could be found.

At least the damn things were staying together. They could be buzzing about alone or in pairs intent on visiting every village from Inverness to Glasgow. Instead they were swarming. This hinted that when the fiends finally did reach their ultimate destination that an overwhelming force would be applied to whatever populace they were set against.

This did not bode well.

The ICW was beginning to get an idea of what their goal may be too. Though it is true that Hogsmeade Valley has been unplotable since before the founding of Hogwarts, many people had a fair idea of its general location and the line that dementors were taking through Scotland wasn't too far off the mark.

This did not bode well at all.

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When the ring of light began to descend, the French witches were ready.

"Maman! Little Angel!" Fleur called as she rushed to her newly arrived family. "I missed you already!"

Hugs and cheek kisses were given all around as everyone fussed over each other in the crisp cold of winter in the Ukraine.

"Can we go in, now?" Gabby called after losing her transformation. She preferred talking through lips even if she could make others understand her calling and trilling through the beak.

"Why are you in such a hurry, Little Angel?" Fleur asked her sister. "Don't you want to look around? We found something quite wonderful behind the temple where we hadn't even bothered to search before."

"It's not part of Angel School, is it?" The littlest Veela on site asked. "I want to go to Angel School."

"Sort of..." Fleur answered.

Her sister looked up with curious eyes as behind her a spectral boy appeared. Harry had 'come out' to hear the answer.

"We didn't see this last time," Segolene started, "we were so focused with recording the main temple that we hadn't even strayed far enough away for Fleur to step through a set of Veela keyed privacy spells hiding a second temple."

"A second temple!" Apolline could not hold in her enthusiasm. As much as she wanted her Little Angel safe and sound at home, every trip out here was a different dream come true for her.

"Yes." Marion nodded. "Actually, I still haven't seen it with my own eyes and I begin to think I never will."

"How so?" Apolline asked.

"I can't breach the wards. Neither can Segolene. Only Fleur has been able to see or touch the temple so far." Marion answered.

Apolline looked to her older daughter full of excitement. Maybe there was something to Gabrielle's idea of coming more than once a week. "Well, what does it look like? Show me!"

The group began to walk past the temple face near which Gabby had traveled to. They turned the corner and walked clear to the other end of the exterior colonnade.

"I don't see anything." Gabby called, unimpressed.

Harry didn't say anything, but he did keep looking back and forth between the 'empty' space before him and the host of females around him. They didn't notice it. Why didn't they notice it? Why did he when they couldn't? Was it because of his bond with Gabby or was it because he was dead? He hesitated to say anything hoping to catch some clue as to why he was special this time.

As far as Gabby could see, the island continued for another hundred meters or so beyond the back face of the main temple and perhaps the same distance to either side. Not a terribly large island, really. There weren't even any trees or hills to block their view of more than three-quarters of the island's shores- the only ones they couldn't see were blocked by the temple that was now behind them.

"Just walk a little further, Little Angel." Fleur prodded. "Ten more paces... maybe twenty."

"Okayyyyyy." Gabby gave the rare whine. She was here for Angel School and that was it!

Gabby strode forward impatiently, Harry, Fleur and the others right behind her.

"You... you can't see it?" Harry asked his little angel. "Really?"

"Can't see wha-haaaaaaa?" Gabby answered, finally seeing 'it' right as she was answering.

As Fleur came up confidently and their mother came up slightly less so, Marion and Segolene held back. They couldn't seem to get any closer. Wards were stopping them.

"You see it too, Harry?" Gabby asked.

"I sure do, Angel." The ghost scratched at the back of his neck, deep in thought.

Before them stood a temple that was much smaller than its larger neighbor but no less spectacular. It was a ring of columns perhaps fifteen meters in diameter and not quite ten meters high before adding in the shallow dome. The columns were narrow, a half meter wide at most. The style was... well... it was spectacular. There were colorful, precise geometric shapes and patterns seemingly randomly interspersed with organic floral patterns. The individual transitions seemed to make no sense when looking at them one at a time and yet it all seemed to flow together in perfect harmony at every level.

One thing was clear. Whoever made this temple, they weren't the same people as those who made the bigger one. This one was light years different. Better. Much better.

"I tried taking pictures of this one yesterday, but the cameras all froze up as soon as they crossed the ward line." Fleur told her mother.

"I still have no idea what it looks like." Marion complained. "Fleur can't even describe it to us without sounding like a complete fool."

Fleur's face went flush a bit. "It's true. The magics which prevent us from recording images of this temple also prevent me from describing it out loud."

"So this one is truly Veela only? Let's go inside then, shall we?" Harry said before glancing back. "Sorry Marion, Segolene."

After the two non-Veela witches both nodded in acceptance, the Delacour women and Harry all moved forward and passed through the colonnade.

"Oh, wow." Harry whispered.

"Yeah..." Gabby added.

Where Harry had passed between two columns in a series of them, he was now in a closed circular room with a column framed portal behind him.

"Oh my God." Apolline gasped as she crossed the threshold behind Harry.

It didn't matter that she chose to enter the temple between a different pair of columns. She came through the same door anyway.

None of that mattered.

"See, Little Angel?" Fleur called out. "Can you see why it relates to Angel School now?"

All around the room a series of fully colored nearly perfect statues stood in silent testimony to a past long forgotten. They were all women of the highest caliber whose beauty, grace, intelligence and power showed clearly on their faces and in their poise.

There were seven of them.

"I know these women." Harry murmured softly yet the words still carried.

Apolline slowly walked up to the statue opposite the entry portal. This one was set on a small platform, one step above her peers. Where the others each held their hands clasped together before them, this one held her hands up and open, filling the room with her presence. Apolline knelt before the one angel she could identify on sight apart from her own daughter. White-blonde hair floated above

deeply tanned skin and soft purple eyes that looked down at the Veela matron in silent reproach.

"Lucifer."

"Now you see she's not a bad girl, don't you?" Gabby asked everyone in the room. "She's in the middle and everything!"

"These are the seven sisters." Harry spoke as he floated from one statue to the other. "I recognize every one of them."

"These are the faces of the mothers of the Veela race." Fleur spoke with awe. "I was in here trying to make sense of this temple for over an hour yesterday and I never even realized exactly who they were."

"This isn't a temple." Apolline said. Harry and the girls stopped what they were doing and turned to the Veela mother. "It's a mausoleum."

They all followed her gaze to the tile floor beneath them. There, finely cut and inlaid stone chips making up the floor revealed a second representation of the seven sisters. There, in muted grays and earth tones the seven sisters were all depicted lying in repose. Each angel had her eyes closed and her hands clasped over her heart. All save one, that is. Lucifer had one hand over her heart and one hand over her stomach. There seemed to be a stain or something under her hand as the tiles were a different color than the field of her robe.

Harry continued to stare at that odd detail until he heard a gasp.

"Look up!" Gabby shouted.

And everyone did look up. There were more gasps as they beheld the third level of this most rare and unusual triptych.

It was a painting... or a charm perhaps... set onto the domed ceiling. It rivaled any work that Harry had yet seen in the magical world as it seemed to combine a wizarding portrait with the illusory properties of Hogwarts' Great Hall. The outermost rim of the magical vision was a long string of children, girls every one, who all seemed to congregate around the feet of the seven angels that took center stage. Seven angels whose full plumage and dazzling golden halos were out in full view for all visitors to see. Well, there was one angel

that was, once again, treated differently than the other six. Where her sisters were all interacting with the children at their feet, she had no children to tend. Rather than minding daughters, she alone focused on the mausoleum's oculus. Her hands were outstretched and open in supplication to the fiery ring of pure gold framing the circular roof opening. Due to positioning, it was once again clear who this angel was. Lucifer.

All of a sudden, it all clicked in Harry's mind. The separation was suspect on its own, but the details were clear in denoting her place within the seven. She was Lucifer; the oldest, the most skilled and closest to their Lord. She was the one put to the sword by bandits-she must have fought the fiercest and defended her sisters at the cost of her own mortal life. She was the one who suffered the greatest after the fall; the first to suffer a mortal's death and the only fallen angel who bore no daughters... no heirs.

As he looked at the face of the Angel Lucifer, he swore to himself that he would always have more in common with Lucifer than Gabby would. He would not allow his Little Angel to suffer as terribly as her archetype and role model. He swore silently to himself that he would accept any sacrifice or suffering necessary to ensure her eternal happiness. Eternal love would be hers. Just like the poem said.

After a suitable period for admiring the artwork and mourning the dead, Harry gently began pushing for a trip back to the main temple. He wanted to learn how to protect Gabby. He wanted to be worthy of being Gabby's Lord. He feared he would never be worthy.

-o\0/o-

"Harry!"

A little silver-blond topped missile streaked into his side. A second one, that is.

"Miss me?" Harry chuckled at the girl wrapped firmly around his waist.

"Uh-huh!" The copy made in Gabby's image grunted into his chest.

As he and Gabby both hugged and tickled Gabby's magical twin, Gabriel approached.

"Welcome back, Harry." Gabriel called with a warm inviting smile and an open hand.

"Hello again, Gabriel." Harry replied, clasping the offered hand before going back to giving his Angels backrubs.

"I see you came prepared this time?" Gabriel asked, eyes on a loose stack of papers and parchment in Gabby's hands.

"Yeah- but... " Harry trailed off. He was preoccupied the whole way in and barely noticed when Apolline shoved a stack of papers and a pen at her daughter. "I have something I'd kind of like your help with this time."

"You fear for her safety, do you not?" The archangel asked.

Harry stopped rubbing the backs of his two Gabbys. "How'd you know?"

Gabriel smiled and ran her fingers across the hand Harry had on his true angel. "Physical contact with you and Gabby, leads to one of the most important features of this place. Magic follows your bond deep into your own soul to learn new history, memories and inner thoughts. It's how we all learned to speak modern English and French. It's also how I knew that you feel the need to better protect your angel."

"You can read my mind?" Harry asked.

"It would be better to say that we can read your souls." Gabriel put a hand on each Gabby causing them both to look up at her and smile. "And let me say that we are most appreciative of your desire to see to her safety."

She then looked deep into Harry's eyes, seemingly boring into his very soul. Actually, he began to think that could be doing exactly that. He was still in contact with both Gabby's after all. "Make no mistake, Harry. You. Are. Worthy."

"I still don't feel worthy." He muttered in reply.

Two little angels hugged him even tighter in reply.

"Perhaps it is time for lessons that may help you feel more worthy of the gifts bestowed upon you?"

Harry nodded.

"Great!" An enthusiastic voice shouted from behind Harry.

"Lucifer!" Both Gabbys left Harry to hug Big Sister Lucifer.

"Come, girls! I have big plans for today, big indeed! Come on!"

Without warning, a wall of pure love and joy washed over them all. Lucifer changed. Her smooth skin hid underneath a coating of feathers. While her smallest downy feathers were all white, her longer feathers were a mix of white, blues and purples in a spotted pattern that matched well with her eyes. Harry noted with interest that Lucifer's beak seemed to be more pronounced than Gabby's; slightly more hawk-like than Gabby's owl-like attributes. Was it age? Was it natural variations? He could ask later.

Lucifer took to the skies, and in her wake two girls fell to the ground praying. It was the fastest way either of them knew to change.

In no time at all, the 'twins' changed causing a fresh wave of love and devotion to wash across Harry and Gabriel as they stood by and watched.

Bye, Harry! See you later! One pure white angel called as the other chirped, Have fun with Gabriel!

The ghost and the archangel stood patiently and watched as two smaller angels rushed to catch up to their larger quarry in a game of aerial tag.

"Thank you, Harry." Gabriel said after a few quiet moments of 'bird' watching.

"Whatever for?" He replied.

Gabriel stopped watching the three distant fliers and turned once again to the young Lord of Angels.

"I know that time flows differently here within the Hall of Angels, yet it bears saying that this is the first time that I have seen Lucifer shed her human appearance and embrace her angelic heritage since the real Lucifer stopped coming. You know not how horrible it was for her, even as a copy of the original, to learn of the fall. She shows more life in these few visits of Gabrielle's than she has in the last two thousand years or more." Gabriel took Harry's hand in hers. "Though... you do know more of her suffering than any other mortal you may yet meet. A life of service and self sacrifice is not an easy life, especially when it is cut unnaturally short."

After a few minutes where she seemed content to read his palm and he seemed content to have his palm silently read, she spoke again.

"They are ready. It is time."

And when she dropped his hand the world blurred. The small valley, creek and large flat stone that came to be Harry and Gabby's gateway into the Hall of Angels melted away until they were replaced by the ridge of a low mountain chain.

"Where are we?" Harry asked.

"Just a playground of sorts. A place where your girls might have some fun and where we can observe from a distance." Gabriel turned to look down a cliff face and Harry did the same.

"What are they doing down there?" Harry asked, straining his eyes in the soft light of Gabby's favorite starry sky.

Even with the light of stars unnumbered, the lighting was still more like dawn or dusk than anything else. He only knew who was at the base of the hill because one brilliant golden halo was dancing about in close proximity to two blue-white ones. All else was lost to him at this distance.

"This is your first lesson today, Harry." Gabriel spoke. "The two of you have unconsciously tapped into your bond to read emotions. Without your consent, this is as far as young Gabrielle may go. With your consent, however, she can know your thoughts and see what you want her to see. This, she can do without your direct knowledge... if you allow her the ability."

"I foresee no time when I should want to restrict her." Harry replied.

"And how are things going with Miss Granger, Harry?" Gabriel asked with a lilt that reminded him that she most certainly knew the answer to that question even if Gabby didn't.

"Oh." Harry replied.

"Exactly. This is but one reason you may wish to control the bond. There are things you will want to do that are either too personal for her to know or too 'grown-up' for her to know for many years yet."

"Right."

Gabriel continued. "And that is what she may see with the bond on her own initiative. More importantly is the conscious control you may exert. All that she sees, all that she hears and all that she does, you may know as well. This is your right as her Lord."

"But why? What can I do with this?" Harry asked.

"Observe Gabrielle." Gabriel replied. "Look without looking down. Look out from her eyes. Listen from her ears. Feel through her skin. Do this without forgetting yourself and where you are. To accomplish this feat, focus on your bond and will Gabrielle into your own senses."

Harry did as Gabriel instructed drawing on the bond tying him to his Angel.

"Woah." Harry staggered for a moment before regaining his balance.

In the plane below, Gabriel put her hand over her mouth, covering a small giggle as best she could.

"That, Lord Potter, is the beginning of what many people call omnipresence. Where ever she is, so too shall you be."

"I feel like there is two of me." Harry looked down the hill at... himself?

"And should you take more angels then you shall feel the same with all of them at the same time."

"Oh, I don't know if I could handle anything of the like."

Gabriel didn't have to cover another unladylike giggle, but she did reply. "It shall be as you will it, Harry, but I do humbly ask that you consider the idea. One angel alone can affect world history. Can you imagine the effect a host of angels may have?"

Harry shuddered. "There is this saying that power corrupts and that absolute power corrupts absolutely."

"But that maxim speaks of power as mortal man knows it. Our power is different. It is pure. It is light that pushes the darkness away." The archangel countered. "Can you not think of living creatures in your experience who may fit this pattern?"

"Like what- oh wait." Harry interrupted himself with an example he knew of already at Hogwarts. "Unicorns, right? And phoenixes?"

Gabriel nodded. "Powerful and purely in the light, both of those breeds are incapable of acting on dark intent. Now, we angels...and by extension our Lords... are the most powerful light aligned beings you will meet on this plane of existence."

"I'm sorry, but you included me in that statement." Harry half joked. "I'm not all that powerful nor am I all that pure."

"Is that so?" Gabriel asked, eyebrow raised. "Would Gabrielle have done what she did in Hogsmeade without your influence? That was you guiding her in her power and in her righteous anger. Did you or did you not give Albus Dumbledore one last chance at redemption? And what of Miss Chang? You laid down the law explaining the morals by which you expect her to act and then you saved her life when she fell. You could have solved at least one problem by allowing her to fall to her death."

Shocked at the immortal woman's words, Harry shouted his response almost before he had the words in his mind. "But that would be wrong!"

Gabriel smiled beautifully in response. "Exactly! You still did what was good and right at a time when you need not have. This is why

you are of the light. This is the power of a Lord of Angels to change the world for the better. You shall choose who is punished, who is rewarded and who is given a chance to repent. Do you think that Miss Chang is unaffected by your words? By your actions? She is a new woman, I don't even have to read the stars to know it is so. It is only natural for her to step back and examine her life after such an experience."

Harry stood silently and absorbed the words that even now echoed through his mind. In this calm period, he began to absorb the information provided him by the link to Gabby that he had opened and left open. On the planes below him, a different yet equally important lesson was being carried out between angels.

Gabby broke out in a fit of giggles.

What is it? Lucifer called.

H-Harry! He's p-peeking at me! At us! Her laughter echoed off the landscape in chirps and clicks.

Well let's give him a show then! Lucifer answered eagerly. Watch girls! I'll show you the best way to get attention no matter how many people you want to talk to and true dark creatures such as demons will flee or face their doom.

With two bubbly little angels watching, and a Lord watching from two angles, Lucifer raised one slender arm straight up. She flicked her wrist, flexed her fingers and reached out to literally grab her halo with her bare hand.

Ooooooohhhh. Two little angles cooed together.

Their big sister then exerted her will over the circlet of light, dragging it out of position until it broke form completely. Soon, golden light was cascading down and then across her body, covering her and her robes completely.

Aaahhhhhhhh. The Gabby twins cooed again.

And when the field of angelic light did fully encase Lucifer, the light flared far beyond what they were prepared to deal with. Both younger angels had to avert their eyes in the face of a ground level

light that rivaled the Sun in intensity. Even up on the hill more than a thousand meters away, Gabriel turned away and Harry was forced to squint.

Your turn, girls! Lucifer cried to the two cringing smaller angels.

They were in awe of Lucifer's radiance, her absolute power and serendipity. They were less than sure of their odds of matching her and Harry knew it. He wanted to see them succeed. He willed them to succeed.

My Lord! They both called upon feeling his will. They would not could not disappoint him.

Staring each other in the eyes, both little angels pushed Lucifer's spectacular presence out of their minds and reached for their own halos. With perfect timing, the two made contact with the rings of raw power hovering above them and they drew the power out of that perfect eternal shape. Blue-white power flowed like water over their bodies just as it had for their older sister before them.

Once again, light washed over the valley as two new stars came into existence to do battle with the night sky above.

"Are you pleased, Lord Potter?" Gabriel said, still averting her eyes from the valley below. Angel she may be, but this was a light that only a Lord of Angels or a similarly empowered angel could gaze upon. Gabriel would have to pull the same trick in order to counter the glare.

"Oh, yes." Harry's attention built to both his Gabby and her magical sister until this awareness encompassed both angels as well as his own body. This was more than just a dueling technique. This had potential.

Feeling their Lord's attention, both Gabby's basked in his presence and he in turn felt their own happiness. The light flooding the valley increased.

The lesson continued for a time with Gabrielle learning to harness the power that was hers to command and with Harry learning to influence Gabrielle's actions through his will. Still, all things come to an end, and Gabriel called them together to end the lesson.

Gabrielle gave her Big Sisters big hugs, and she and Harry gave her twin the biggest of hugs.

It was then that Harry saw something different about his Angel. "Gabby?"

"Yes?" She... both of them turned to meet his gaze and it was then that the change really stood out.

"Your eyes..." Harry said softly, kneeling down before the two little girls to get a closer look. "They're-"

"Glowing." Lucifer finished for him. "A little bit, but yes they are. And the light will only increase over time."

Harry looked back at Lucifer and then at Gabriel. The glow... he saw it before, of course, but it never seemed to register that his Angel didn't have it.

Gabriel took up the explanation. "Gabrielle has, with this lesson, drawn on enough of her power to begin showing the proof of her angelic heritage even without changing. The effect is not strong yet, and it will not grow to the level you see in us for many long years, but grow it will."

As wonderful as his Angel was, Harry feared for her social development.

"They're gorgeous, of course-" both Gabby's flushed and Harry could sense their joy from his words over the bond, "but... won't this cause her even more trouble at school?"

Both Gabbys' jaws went slack. Oh, no. It would make her even more different! Everyone would stare harder and whisper more.

"Perhaps a quick lesson in the use of your angelic aura... the thrall as your mother and sister call it... is what we need to solve this problem." Gabriel to the rescue.

She had their undivided attention.

"When next you meet your peers, you should look into the eyes of whomever you wish to influence and will them into complacency.

You cannot mask the glow short of making yourself completely unnoticeable or invisible, and that is not your goal. People will see you and your beautiful eyes... and will simply overlook the detail as unimportant." Gabriel lectured. "To do this, imagine releasing your thrall- but only through your eyes. This simple trick will naturally develop along with your control... and it is a good way to learn how to influence others without changing forms or using a wand to cast spells."

"You mean like the Imperius Curse?" Harry asked.

"Nothing so vulgar as that." Gabriel replied. "Whether Gabrielle lifts a wand or not to use her powers, intent is still key. The Imperius Curse is labeled dark, and rightly so, because the caster takes joy in forcing a victim to submit. At the same time, mind magics cast with good intent are still accepted as light. Gabrielle may have been able to open Cho Chang's heart to Luna's plight without resorting to threats of violence if she used this technique."

Harry's face pinked. "And without Cho falling out the window, I imagine."

Gabriel nodded without seeming to accuse. "As you say. But the point remains that Gabrielle has a way to deflect the attention she faces at school... both for her eyes and for her fame." Gabriel looked at her smaller namesake. "Perhaps your mother would be willing to help you practice before you go to bed tonight."

The two Gabby's looked at each other in surprise for a moment before one of them exclaimed, "I didn't know Angel School would have homework!"

"It will happen from time to time dear... more so for Harry than for you, but it will happen." The warm chocolate eyed archangel smirked before briefly glancing at the stars above. "But it is now time for you to return to your mother and sister, for they must be concerned. You seem to have missed lunch."

Once again, Gabrielle gave her Big Sisters hugs, and she and Harry gave her twin another big farewell hug. Gabby still wanted to take her magical twin home with them. Lucifer, of course, couldn't resist the opportunity to tease. Depending on what kind of sister Gabby wanted, she either had to ask her parents or Harry to take the

necessary steps. Gabby promised to work on her puppy dog eyes more to get somebody to agree to her demands.

Finally, Lord and Angel left the hall to return to the world of the living as three powerful magical constructs watched them leave.

"I miss them already." Gabby sighed.

"Fear not, beloved Little Sister, for we shall rest again soon." Gabriel soothed the shortest of the three.

Behind them, a star in the sky began to move. The star came closer until wings became visible to either side of the twinkling golden light. Not really a star, then. An angel. The as yet unknown angel came down to land at the feet of the three.

This new angel released her transformation, wings shrank into soft curly brown hair and downy feathers faded to reveal creamy skin. Her deep chocolate eyes remained.

"Gabriel." The newcomer stated.

"Gabriel," The one made in her image replied as she took and kissed the hand of a true archangel. "We are honored that you appear before us."

"You have done well. Were He still among us, our Lord would say that He is well pleased." Gabriel then reached a hand out to the youngest angel and brushed it against the girl's cheek. "And you, young one. You are blessed with a kind and loving Lord. You have done us all proud and I am sure you will continue to do so."

Gabrielle closed her eyes and leaned into the immortal's caress.

"Is your time here at an end?" Lucifer asked. "Will you finally follow your sisters to His side?"

"Not yet." The last of the old host replied. "I am to bear witness to the fruits of our great labors before I go."

"How long?" Gabby asked. It saddened her to see the true archangel wait so patiently for her assigned tasks to come to an end.

Neither Gabriel turned to look at the stars above as the stars would never reveal her purpose. Still, her time on this plane was nearly done and they all knew it. So very little remained to be fulfilled.

"Not long... soon."

End Chapter

Chapter Notes:

I... don't have any? Weird, I know.

Insert standard legal disclaimer and boilerplate notes here.

...as seen previously on The Little Veela that Could...

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The Little Veela that Could

Chapter Twenty-three: Damned If You Do

"Ah, Draco," Severus spoke over the rim of his wine glass. "Do have a seat."

Draco took the offered place at his godfather's table.

"Would you like some veal? Perhaps some prime rib..." The older man continued. "The roast potatoes are quite nice tonight."

"Thank you, Headmaster." Draco replied as he began to add a few of the proffered items to his plate.

"Now, Draco," Severus stated in a tone that was as warm as he could manage, "we are alone in my quarters and we've known each other for years. There is no reason you cannot call me Uncle Severus as before."

Draco ducked his head and took a bite from his plate though he did not immediately comment on the older Slytherin's statement. In truth, the veal was quite good. Unworthy bastards that they are, house elves are fine cooks.

After some quality silence, Severus chose to be sociable again. "And how is your mother? I hear she was released from St. Mungo's only the day before..."

Draco swallowed and collected himself. Mother's injury still cut him deeper than he cared to admit.

"Surely she is happy to be home again? Or were there complications?"

Draco did detect a hint of concern in Severus's voice. The young lord knew his godfather had always favored Mother, but perhaps it went a little further? No. Draco knew the skeleton in his godfather's closet and he was sure Mother knew as well. A half-blood's advances, no matter who the half-blood, would never be welcomed by Lady Malfoy. She was a proud pureblood daughter of the once great House of Black.

"Mother was released, though she has taken this opportunity to begin the restoration of her childhood home. Sadly, it's become quite the chore... she's pulled house elves from several properties to deal with the dust and rot left since Grandmother's passing."

Severus nodded in seeming acceptance of Draco's reply. He took a drink from his goblet before proceeding.

"She did not return to Malfoy Manor?"

Ah. Tricky subject. Luckily for the young lord, he has a perfectly reasonable lie to fall back on.

"Home still reminds her too much of Father."

It wasn't even a lie really... just not the complete truth. Mother would have moved to the old Black family home to escape reminders of a happier time anyway- only she would have waited for the elves to finish making the house presentable. The potential for a Dark Lord to pop in and out of Malfoy Manor without so much as a by-your-leave was too much for mother or son to handle, however, and she has yet to leave London.

Luckily, Severus seemed to accept Draco's excuse. At least... he didn't push any further on that front.

"And the future Lady Malfoy?" Severus drawled.

"What future Lady Malfoy?" Draco responded.

"Miss Greengrass has hardly left your side as of late." The man came back. "She is your chief lieutenant in Magical Traditions, is she not? The two of you also spend a great deal of time studying together. And then there are the moonlight strolls through the grounds..."

"I've taken Astoria on as many moonlight strolls as Daphne." Draco defended himself. "And Daphne is a fine partner for revising... her arithmancy grades are the highest in our year... and the Greengrass family is as well bred and steeped in tradition as the Malfoys or Blacks ever were. Were it not for the dueling aspect, I daresay she could run Magical Traditions without my help."

Draco didn't bother to point out that there had been another witch with higher arithmancy grades than Daphne in their year until she ran away to France. Granger was an anomaly; a freak of nature. Nothing more.

"And yet you have no time at all for Miss Parkinson these days..." Severus pushed again.

Draco had to hold back a frustrated sigh. "Have we nothing better to talk about than my love life?"

There was a glint in the older man's eye. Draco could have sworn he saw jealousy or something more negative in that glint. If Draco didn't know about his godfather's trips out of the castle on the Dark Lord's orders then he would think Severus was leaving the castle to seek a woman's touch... possibly at a fixed price.

Eyes down. Mustn't let the expert legilimens read that thought no matter how close the two were. Suddenly, intentionally discussing the Dark Lord's plans seemed a much safer subject.

"Very well," Snape muttered. "On to business."

The dour man took up his goblet and drained it in one pull.

"Magical Traditions is due for a meeting in two days, is it not?" Severus asked.

Draco nodded. "Wednesday evening and again on Friday evening... twice weekly just as it was last term. Why do you ask?"

"I suggest that you have those students still ensnared in the remedial etiquette lessons-" code for mudblood and muggle raised half-bloods "walk through the gardens by the East Wing in a mock courting exercise."

"If you insist... a few of the remedial students are almost to the point where they can graduate to dueling. It will be hard to argue them away soon." Draco answered slowly.

Severus sneered. "That is a problem you shan't have for much longer so long as you do as you are told."

Draco suddenly got the idea that being in the gardens on Wednesday evening was a bad thing.

"What of Daphne? She will be chaperoning the group." Draco returned. There would be one or two other good pureblood students with her to keep the others acting within proper decorum as well.

"Be ready to retrieve her at a moment's notice." Severus's sneer became more pronounced. "Things are likely to become very dangerous outside though staying indoors should be sufficient for your safety... and Miss Greengrass's as well."

"I'll be sure to remember." Draco responded.

"Tell no one. I shall be acting the part of the surprised headmaster and shall be defending my charges as well as can be expected."

Draco nodded, eyes down at his meal. He made no other mention of his foreknowledge and the rest of their meal passed in pleasant conversations which had no bearing on the future. All the while, Draco thought furiously.

He had a bargaining chip now. A big one. He absolutely had to speak to Potter as soon as possible.

As soon as his meal was done and farewells were exchanged, Draco left his godfather's quarters. But what to do? He was stuck in a mental debate over sending an owl post letter to a ghost when he heard some noise from his left, from the potions classroom. Someone was there.

The Slytherin prefect drew his wand and approached silently, his movements easily masked by the rather loud sounds coming from inside. As Draco move into the classroom proper, he spotted a back arched in hard labor. Messy blonde locks fell down to scrape along the very floor stones being scrubbed clean by a witch with mismatched socks – one in striped Ravenclaw colors and the other in a checkerboard of red and white.

Perfect. The Lovegood girl was well known for her stay in France and practically Potter's adopted sister if the rumors were to be believed. Draco put his wand away and coughed to get the girl's attention.

"Here, have some lozenges." Luna commented as she turned to look at the boy behind her.

She slipped one hand into a fold in her robes and retrieved a handful of shiny pink hard candies. They were not wrapped in any way.

Draco declined. "I think I can do without."

Rather than returning the lozenges to their hiding place, Luna popped the lot of them into her mouth and began to crunch them up vigorously. Draco soldiered on.

"I need to deliver a message to Potter."

Luna made no effort to respond to the boy, but she didn't turn back to her labor either. Draco didn't blame her, as scrubbing the floor was for elves and muggles. He thanked Merlin that his godfather would never assign him such an odious detention... or any detention at all for that matter.

"It's very important." Getting no response, Draco tried again. "Time sensitive too. Is there anything you can do to reach him for me? I don't think I can just wait for him to happen by."

Luna turned her head a bit, a move that caught all of the lamplight in the room and threw it towards Draco in an unnaturally deep sparkle. It reminded the snake prince a little too much of former Headmaster Dumbledore, but before he could excuse himself and escape, she spoke.

"Chamaeleo. Hmmmm... I really expected an oviparous serpentes at this hour... or at the very least a great greasy bat."

It was Draco's turn to turn his head in confusion. Once again, she spoke before he could collect himself.

"Draco Malfoy. Light's champion is both great and good, and his light shall shine down upon us all."

With that, the younger witch turned back to her assigned task of scrubbing the potions classroom floor by hand. Draco opened his mouth... and then closed it. He really didn't want to know.

Draco cursed silently and left the room. What a waste. The mere fact that two muggles took that girl in proves their inferiority. And he wasn't about to speak to any Weasley about Potter. Better to entrust important post to a common school owl than one of their pathetic birds. And that was assuming that any outbound owl post could leave the castle unmonitored let alone reach foreign shores in forty-eight hours. That option was risky and without guarantee.

Now that he thought about it, Draco wasn't sure why he thought Luna would be able to get a message to Potter much less get it to him quickly. It must be her weirdness rubbing off on him.

He would just leave well enough alone... leave the mudbloods' and blood traitors' fates to chance... but then Daphne and her co-hostesses would still be at risk. Damn it all. A dead Gryffindor was being a horrible influence on the Slytherin prince.

On the other hand, many fair young maidens would owe him, and owe him big. Mudblood maidens, true, but maidens just the same.

Looking at it from the proper perspective gave the Slytherin a perfect excuse to act.

Draco turned towards his dormitory. He would do what he could and leave the rest to fate.

-o\0/o-

"Ohhhhh..." Hermione cooed at Gabby's softly glowing crystal blue eyes. "Just when I thought you couldn't get any more beautiful..."

Gabby blushed. She knew she was pretty and she knew she would grow up to be just like Momma and Big Sissy Fleur, but it still felt good when someone told her she was pretty. It made her warm.

"Okay, Gabby," Harry started, "now do just what you did with your Momma right after dinner."

The little silver-blond nodded happily. She scooted closer to the edge of the bed she was on and stared at 'Mione, who was once again sitting at the desk in her personal dormitory in her private dreamworld. No, it's not terribly imaginative on her part, but it is very safe and familiar and orderly and those are things much appreciated by bookish girls with adventurous spectral boyfriends.

"Wha – ummmnnnn... what's she supposed to be doing, Harry?" Hermione asked.

Harry looked between the two girls, carefully judging the expressions. Gabby's was one of concentration. The very tip of her tongue could be seen sneaking past soft pink lips. Hermione was a mix of patience and confusion. Good. Delight and awe were missing.

"Do you see anything different about Gabby tonight, 'Mione?" Harry asked.

Hermione responded with a 'am I supposed to see something' shrug. "No?"

Yes! Gabby was as happy as Harry with that answer and she lost her concentration.

"Oh! What beautiful eyes!" Hermione cooed before her eyes flew wide open. "Wait! Didn't I..."

Gabby giggled.

"We still have to work on keeping it up, Angel," Harry snickered, "but we can do that tomorrow afternoon. I'm sure you will have it down before going back to school on Monday."

"Okayyyy!" Gabby shot back.

"Just what are you two on about?" Hermione huffed.

"We're working on her ability to keep people from staring at her eyes." Harry answered.

Gabby piped in as well. "And if I do it right, people might not stare at me at all!"

"But why would you want to..."

Hermione looked between the suddenly much less happy Little Angel and Harry. Harry knew well about staring classmates and he was no angel. Gabby was... and now her eyes were unique. They were sure to draw even more attention.

"Oh."

Angel and Lord nodded as one.

"And the whispers are just as bad as I ever got." Harry added.

"How did this happen?" Hermione asked.

"Angel School!" Gabby answered eagerly. "It was soooooo fun! Lucifer took me and my Angel School twin and taught us a new trick and it was great! And before that- and before that we went to this new thing out back which was a... a..."

But Gabby was stuck right there.

"A what?" Hermione prodded.

"It was a mmmmmrrrrmmmrmm." Harry scrunched up his face in concentration. "A mmmMMMmmaaaaauuuuuuuuu."

Nope couldn't do it.

"Bloody wards..." Harry grumbled. Hermione didn't know whether to censure him for cursing or to ask what he was talking about, so she settled for glaring to make both points at the same time. "Pitty I can't just turn this dream into a copy of the island..."

"Why not?" Hermione didn't want to miss this.

She wriggled her nose as she did any time she wanted her dreamscape to change in some way.

"I now give Harry Potter the right to alter this dream in any way he sees fit." Hermione spoke into the ether with conviction.

"Let's test that, shall we?" Harry murmured slyly.

The boy-who-died wriggled his nose, and Hermione's Beauxbatons uniform was instantly replaced with her dirty Gryffindor uniform. When Gabby giggled at the older girl's misfortune, Harry wriggled his nose at her next.

"Hey!" Gabby squawked. Then she saw what it was she was wearing. "Ummn... nevermind."

Gabby was back in her dress-up costume too. Alice. She liked being Alice.

Before Hermione could lodge a protest to her scandalous attire, Harry closed his eyes and concentrated. He wriggled his nose again. The room they were in faded away and the world around them changed. There was snow... and a frozen lake... and then two large forms began to resolve into buildings...

...only to dissolve again. Without warning, the island in the middle of a lake in the middle of Ukraine vanished to be replaced by 'Mione's dorm room again.

"I'm sorry, Harry, but I can't let you do that."

Dead wizard, dirty school-witch and angel Alice all turned to face the owner of that voice.

"Lucifer?" Harry asked.

"Yay!"

Gabby shot off 'Mione's bed and tackled the fallen angel. Or rather, she tried to. The little angel ended up falling right through her white haired purple eyed big sister.

THUMP

"Ow..."

Gabby struggled to get back up after hitting the wall head first.

"I'm sorry Little Angel, but I am not here to play." Lucifer said apologetically. "I am here only to say that your friend may not know that which you tried to reveal to her."

Hermione wanted to say something... to ask something, anything... but she was struck speechless. Lucifer stood before her. Morning Star. How many times was Harry going to do this to her?

Lucifer looked at Hermione looking at her. She drew one hand up and pointed her index finger at the British witch and then motioned for Hermione to drop to the floor. The young witch collapsed on the spot. Out cold.

"Lucifer!" Harry shouted before jumping over to his girlfriend and pulling her onto the bed. "What the hell did you do that for!"

Gabby's demand to be taught how to do that went unanswered.

"Please forgive me, Lord Potter," Lucifer replied, "but there are things that mortal kind is not meant to know. The mausoleum of my sisters is Sacred to us. My sisters' daughters and their daughters' daughters unto the last generation may know of it. Those who share a blood bond with an angel may know of it. No other. My Lord commands it to be so. It is Sacred to Him."

That brought the young wizard and Lord of Angels up short. "I'm sorry, Lucifer. I didn't know."

"Do not worry, Harry." The ancient angel copy replied. "Allow me to offer this small consolation..."

Lucifer bowed slightly and waved her hand at the wall behind Harry.

-Knock- -Knock-

Harry and Gabby both looked back at the noise. It seemed that someone was knocking at their door.

"Who is it?" Gabby called, not quite yelling.

"Hello?" A soft voice answered from the other side of the door.

"Luna!" Gabby shouted and charged the door.

Two new visitors in one night! Gabby thought. Wow!

She opened the door and welcomed her other English big sister into 'Mione's dream dorm.

"Lady Venus." Luna greeted the angel copy with a smile.

"Miss Lovegood." Lucifer nodded to Luna. "And now I must be going."

"So soon?" Gabby called, disappointment plain in her voice.

"As I said before Little Angel, I am not here to play."

"Do you mind if I ask how you are here?" Harry asked. "And how you were able to kick Gabby's mother and Grandmother out of a pensieve memory of the Hall of Angels?"

Lucifer looked between Harry and Gabby.

"The human mind is susceptible to many powers. One can speak to another in their dreams or one can review their own memories or the memories of another... and that is just the beginning of what is possible. The Hall of Angels was created with such powers as it's

brick and mortar." Lucifer spared a brief glance at Luna. "That is all I can say unless Luna wishes to join her sister for a brief nap."

"Thank you, but no." Luna demurred.

Lucifer pointed her hand once more at Hermione and the girl began to stir. "And now, I must take my leave."

The magical image of a fallen angel faded from view just as Hermione's eyes were opening again.

"What happened?" Hermione asked.

"Congratulations, sister dear." Luna replied. "You were smote, then you were un-smote. How does it feel to be smote by Lucifer?"

"Luna?" Hermione was fully alert now. "How did you get in my dream?"

"Why, magic, of course." The dirty blonde replied.

Harry snorted, Gabby giggled and Hermione huffed.

"I think I am beginning to get a feel for being an angel." Luna called airily.

"You are not an angel." Hermione corrected her sister. Being smote left her cranky. "I'm quite sure I can tell the difference between a witch and an angel now, thank you very much."

Luna stared down at her sister. Quite an accomplishment for the shorter girl. "I am delivering a message and I have accepted Harry Potter as my personal Lord and Savior. I think that qualifies."

"It does not." Hermione huffed.

"Ladies, please." Harry raised his hands in a placating gesture.

He wriggled his nose and both witches received a pair of wings and a halo, non-magical costume style.

"Now you are both angels." Harry said firmly.

"I wanna be an angel!" Gabby shouted, hand in the air as she bounced in place.

Before Hermione could say that she was, in fact, an Angel, Harry wriggled two more wing and halo sets; one for Gabby and one for himself.

"There. We're all angels now." Harry's words caused Gabby to laugh and Hermione to roll her eyes while fighting off a smile.

"Shall I deliver my message, oh Lord?" Luna asked theatrically, falling to her knees before Harry.

Considering how she usually acted, Harry couldn't tell if she was playing a game or not. Hoping it was the former, he chose to respond in kind.

"Verily! I command you to speak, Angel Luna." Harry called imperiously with one index finger raised into the air for dramatic effect.

With her palms and forehead pressed firmly against the floor tiles, Luna spoke. "Oh wise and powerful Lord of Angels, I bring news of your former foil. He seeks your ear in a matter of great import and no small urgency."

"Come again?" How many different ways could that girl throw him for a loop?

Luna sat upright again, a hand on her hip and an exasperated look on her face. "Really Harry. I thought you had managed to drive off your wrackspurts. They're not supposed to be attracted to the deceased... well I don't think they are. Perhaps Daddy's research was mistaken."

The young Ravenclaw shook herself sober and tried again. "Malfoy wants to talk to you. Soon. Says it's urgent."

"Oh," Harry replied. "Thank you."

And with that, 'angel' Luna got up and made for the door.

"Where are you going?" Gabby asked in dismay. "You just got here!"

Luna turned back around, her dreamy eyes back in place already. "I'm sorry, but Mummy is teaching me and Daddy the Patronus Charm this week. I don't want to miss a single lesson."

"Well, okay..." Gabby had to admit that was a good reason. "Come back soon!"

Luna nodded and waved happily from the door before stepping out. She kept the wings and halo.

"Do you think she can?" Harry turned at Hermione's question. "Come back, that is."

"I... I suppose it's possible. I don't know if that was a present from Lucifer or if that was really Luna's doing." He answered.

Hermione idly nudged one shoe off to scratch an itch through her silky white stocking. Harry found his attention firmly captured.

"I guess we'll just... have... to... er, ask... I suppose."

Someone noticed.

"Ewwwwwwwww..." Gabby mock hurled. "If you two are going to be all kissy-face then I want to go flying."

Harry's face turned red. Hermione noticed what she was doing, and how Harry was watching her do it, and turned red. Gabby sprouted real wings and jumped out the window.

"Er..." Harry started. Yes, very smooth. "I'll just go close the window, shall I?"

Hermione looked between Harry and the window a few times while scratching the back of her neck. And blushing deeper.

"Give us a warning when she tires out and comes back?" She asked timidly.

"Absolutely." Harry said with conviction.

He edged closer to 'angel' Hermione in her custom Gryffindor uniform. He'd will Gabby to stay away if he had to. No hesitation at all. And Malfoy could wait a few hours at least. It was night in France, so it was night in England too. The ponce was probably sleeping right now and Harry wanted no part of the Slytherin prince's dreams. Not when he was in this one with his 'Mione... and not when she was looking like she did right now.

-o\0/o-

Draco was just about to sink his teeth into a juicy cut of roast beef when he noticed someone sitting down next to him. Someone transparent.

"Can I help you?" He asked the ghost.

She stopped looking longingly at the meat on his plate long enough to answer his question. "You wanted to talk to someone, didn't you?"

He looked her over, noticing the way she didn't sit properly in her seat. It was as if she were only playing at sitting down. He felt a particularly cold spot form on his thigh and shivered. That better be an accident and not the coy specter's way of flirting with him.

"I don't know what you are talking about."

Draco dismissed the dead muggleborn and took his well deserved bite of roast beef. Maybe if he made a show of enjoying his meal then he could increase the ghost's suffering a little.

Myrtle narrowed her eyes. Draco took it for a point in his favor.

"Of course not, you twit. You asked for-"

She stopped abruptly and looked around. There were other Slytherins at the table but they were not too close... and Snape was nowhere to be seen. The next bit came out in a whisper.

"You asked for Potter."

Draco stopped chewing. So his message was received after all.

"I did." He answered. "What of it?"

Draco bit back a curse when his right cheek became unbearably cold.

"He's here." She whispered into his ear. "Follow me."

Myrtle floated through a section of wall not too far down, heading in the general direction of the nearest stair. After finishing off the best morsels remaining on his plate, Draco rose and left the Great Hall. Luckily, no one interrupted him.

His suspicions were proven correct when he spotted Myrtle waiting at the foot of the stairs. Upon seeing him, she turned and flew straight through the ceiling above. Draco followed as best he could.

The trail ended when Myrtle entered a bathroom on the second floor. It was the very room Myrtle is supposed to have died in if Draco remembered the stories correctly. How macabre. He opened the door.

"... and you bloody well know that the great greasy git comes down to breakfast every morning just to see if Gryffindor managed to get any points at all the day before only to take them all away again. All of them! He doesn't even bother with an excuse anymore! And it's like he lives to throw me in detention... any Gryffindor really... and the snakes have more points than they've ever had before! Ever!"

Even if he didn't recognize the voice, Draco would be able to tell a Weasley rant apart from the rest by subject matter alone. Damn. He had to go in there. Draco straightened his back, buffed his prefect's badge with a quick charm and stepped into the bathroom, confident smirk in place.

"If I had known I was coming to a party, I would have brought Daphne along." Draco said as he took in the room.

There was Harry, as promised, surrounded by redheads, holding court and listening to the common man's grievances. The youngest brother had just stopped spouting off, his hate finding a new target in Draco. Just off to one side, the Weasley twins were ignoring their brother and anyone else in favor of a piece of parchment. Funny; he never took them for the studious type before. The Weasley sister was leaning against a sink and talking to Myrtle... or she was until

Draco came in. Now she just stared at him with an unreadable expression.

Pretty good for a Weasley, really. The only reason to believe she hated him outright was the red and gold of her tie and the red of her hair.

"Sod off, Malfoy." Ron. How predictable.

"Now now, Weasley..." Draco drawled, "I was invited same as you."

Ron looked about ready to make Draco sod off when a hand came down on the red head's shoulder. A transparent blue one.

"He's not having you on, mate." Harry told Ron. "We've got business."

Ron's face went as red as his hair.

Harry continued. "Look. I'll see if there's anything I can do... but I'm not sure what I can do anymore. Snape's got control of the castle wards and I don't want him getting ideas on how to use them."

"Fine." Ron continued. "I'll just leave you to lovebirds to it then. See you after?"

"Of course. It's been ages since I've been up to the dorms." Harry replied.

Ron nodded to no one in particular and walked out.

"I'm with Ronnikins, Harry..."

"whatever you two end up doing..."

"...we don't want to know about."

Fred and George both bowed before following their brother out.

"You know they're going to listen in anyway, don't you?" Ginny called from by the sinks.

"I know some good privacy wards." Draco responded.

"They won't do you any good. Not when those two berks are listening in." Ginny came up to Harry. "Give us a kiss?"

Ginny offered her cheek and Harry promptly kissed it. As he withdrew, she held her hand up to where his spectral lips touched skin.

"Cold." She said quietly.

"Give me some time, Gin." Harry replied. "They say that good things come to those who wait."

"Do they?" She asked while making her way to the door. "I hope they're right."

The room was down to two ghosts and a wizard, and Myrtle didn't look anywhere near ready to leave. She was playing with her hair in front of one of the mirrors.

"She won't say anything." Harry told Draco.

The blonde nodded his acceptance and cast his spells.

"I've had a most unusual request from Headmaster Snape. He asked me to arrange for the Muggleborns and Half-bloods attending Magical Traditions tomorrow evening to be sent into the gardens. Without a professor to look over them."

The two were staring at each other, both looking for some sign of... anything, really.

"He suggested that something would happen. Something potentially bad for anyone in the gardens."

This, Harry had no trouble believing.

"And you're telling me this because..." He lead.

"Because I want to be on the winning side." Malfoy stated firmly. "I can help you. Here's your chance to be the hero once again. Huzzah to the Boy-Who-Lived and all that."

If this were 'Mione or Ron or some random Hufflepuff, that would have been enough for Harry. This was different. This was Draco Malfoy.

"And what makes you think I'm on the winning side?" Harry asked.

"Oh, let's see..." Draco pretended to think about it. "Your side has hundreds of international aurors, loads of public support, you and your little angel friend can burn whole villages to ash in minutes. The Dark Lord has his loyal followers- those few that survived Christmas Break anyway- and possibly some dark creatures."

"So you're not doing this out of the goodness of your own heart then?"

Draco snorted. "Surely you never believed that?"

"Not really." Harry shook his head. "I just don't understand you, Malfoy. You were an absolute git when I was alive and even for a bit after I died. I half expected you to start yelling about how I should fear for my friends' safety now that Dumbledore is dead."

The young lord paused for a moment before answering.

"I came face to face with the Dark Lord this summer. He wasn't what I was told he would be. My father..." Draco stopped and considered his words for a moment. "A Malfoy bows to no one, Potter. Not to any Queen, not to Dumbledore and not to any Dark Lord. Father forgot this fact and paid for it with his life."

"And you don't..."

It seemed to Draco that Harry may have been catching on even if his mouth was faster than his brain.

"I believed him once, yes. Now? I want my mother to be safe from the inhuman beast that calls himself a wizard. Your little angel didn't hurt Mother, he did."

"Why me? Why not the I.C.W.?" Harry didn't want to ask the next one, but he'd been wrong before. "Snape?"

"You really believe Snape is on your side?" Draco shook his head disbelievingly. "What happened to you, Potter? Some of those creatures Lovegood is always going on about get to you or something? If I tell someone from the I.C.W. or if I spread a rumor around the school then Snape will deny everything. He'll know I'm to blame for it, he'll cover his tracks and then he'll come for me. He can't find out... my godfather is loyal to the Dark Lord and the Dark Lord's reach is greater than you know. If it looks like I said anything then my mother's life is forfeit and mine as well."

Harry paced back and forth high above the floor stones. After a few moments, Harry stopped and turned to the blonde wizard. "I can't stay overnight, but I will be back tomorrow."

The ghost nodded to Draco and left. The Slytherin wizard shivered as he stood there and tried to make sense of it all.

"If this is some trap," A soft whisper came from Draco's right, "you'll never leave my bathroom. Never."

The young Slytherin turned to see a very serious looking Myrtle staring daggers at him. After a tense minute or two of ghostly intimidation, Myrtle slowly backed off and disappeared into one of the bathroom stalls.

Draco wondered if Zabini still had any firewhiskey left in his trunk.

-o\0/o-

"Alain." Harry called to the man who was as close to a father as he'd had for a good long while.

The man in question closed the door behind him. They were in his office in Paris, yet he was very high key, not at all his usual self. He didn't bother to sit down.

"I hope this is important, Harry." Alain ran a hand down his front to straighten out his tie and tie bar. "I am right in the middle of some important negotiations and this meeting can't be postponed."

Harry nodded and got right to it. "Malfoy told me there is going to be an attack on the muggleborns and half-bloods in Hogwarts tomorrow evening during a club meeting. Outside."

Alain stood still as a statue for a moment before silently cursing to himself. "How reliable is this information?"

"Draco got it straight from Snape's mouth." Harry countered.

"And you believe this boy?"

"He made a fair argument." Harry replied. "Either he's telling the truth or there is some sort of trap for me in the castle."

"I'm inclined to believe there is a threat." Alain answered. "Thank you Harry. You may have brought me the very information we've been waiting for. You should go home and take a well earned rest. If it is a trap for you, I don't want you getting caught in it."

Harry looked off to the side. He couldn't look Alain in the eyes while saying the next bit.

"I errrrrr... I plan on going back tomorrow, Alain."

"Harry. Please be reasonable-"

But Harry had his mind made up. "This isn't Azkaban. Hogwarts is full of people I care about. I can't stay out of it this time."

"And what of Gabrielle?" Alain shot back.

"I'll..." Harry lost his fire for a moment. He didn't want to put his Angel at risk. Not if there was any other way. "I'll be going alone."

Alain nodded. Harry left.

-o\0/o-

Hogwarts always was a highly magical structure. Some would even say alive. This morning, it was nervous. The whole place.

The 'guests' from across the Channel were being particularly active right from the start too.

All through breakfast, students from the tower dormitories would approach the Main Stair only to find that aurors had sealed it into

one configuration that allowed passage from the third to first floors with the fewest steps possible. As magic was involved, that number of steps happened to be four.

Any students who cared to look outside before heading off to breakfast would also witness a steady stream of broom riders zipping between the main entry doors, down the path and out the front gates. That was where apparation and portkey wards fell off and the snow picked up again. If the student had particularly keen vision, they might notice several small groups of broomriders methodically crossing and re-crossing every square meter of the valley.

Those lucky few Hogwarts students who did notice thought it an oddity to be sure, but as there were fewer fit, attractive twenty-somethings strolling the castle halls themselves, the local teen populace was more disappointed than curious. The aurors almost never spoke directly to any students, so it was pointless to ask what all the movement was about. Disappointed yes, but still nervous and not even the lions were brave enough to chat up an auror to find out what all the fuss was about.

This was the atmosphere Harry entered when he returned to the castle that morning. He spoke briefly to Myrtle. He went up to Gryffindor Tower and chatted up his former teammates... mostly stories about what Krum's like when he's not trying to intimidate his opposition. He's funny? Really? And how would you know he's a good dancer? Ask Luna? Really? After a few more minutes of joking around, Harry took his leave to flit about as ghosts are want to do and the others went down in force to assault the eggs and bacon. He saw Susan and Cedric. He waved to Cho and winked at Luna, who was with Cho at the time and looked quite happy to be with the Ravenclaw Head Girl. Looks like Gabriel was right about that one... not that Harry ever expected her to be wrong.

And while Harry was looking for certain people, both living and not, to talk to, certain people, both living and not, were looking for him. In fact, he picked up a stalker. A spectral stalker with a rather heavy bloodstain covering the front of his robes.

It was during lunch that things truly came to a head.

Harry had found his way to the top of the astronomy tower. Known mostly for it's night owl classes and passionate evening encounters, the tower saw much less use during the day. A combination of active patrols and sunlight tended to hamper both of the tower's primary activities. Still, it could be a quiet getaway for someone good at sneaking about who wanted the best view of Hogwarts Valley available.

Harry was Floating dead center of one of the open glassless windows, the very same window Cho fell out of in fact, when his body suddenly seized up.

"I've got you now you rotten little bastard..." Headmaster Snape growled out from behind the ghost.

Shite! Harry wanted to move, wanted to say something but all he could do was continue to look down into the school grounds and the forest beyond.

"How does it feel, Potter?" Snape's voice came from so very close. Harry's anger grew exponentially as did his shame at being trapped so easily. "What? Nothing to say?"

The amusement in Snape's voice fell away to be replaced by pure loathing.

"You worthless brat. I'll see you suffer untold miseries for what you've done to me..."

Harry heard Snape take a few steps as if pacing.

"The charm I have you under will last a day or two for most spirits. Pathetic as you are, I'm sure that you might somehow cheat your way out of it. That won't do. I shall find something more permanent sooner rather than later..."

At this point, Harry could almost make the greasy bastard's smug face out in the corner of his vision. He had come around to get a look, one more time, at his prey.

"You see, Potter," and never had Snape said the name with quite so much bile. Not even when James was alive, "There are ways of

trapping spirits like you into inanimate objects. Ghostly prisons, if you will. It's quite easy, actually, and you can do it to anything."

Snape slipped over to Harry's other side.

"How would you like to spend the rest of your existence as a chamber pot in Knockturn Alley? Hmm? Or perhaps a dried dung pile sitting in a forgotten corner of the castle dungeons... in a room sealed off from any visitors... or light... or noise... or anything... forever?"

Harry really didn't like those options. In fact, gutting Severus Snape with his bare hands seemed like a much better option right then. Maybe Harry would get the chance to do it before he was consigned to eternity as a pile of dried dung.

He briefly thought of summoning Gabrielle to his side, but then he really didn't want to risk bringing her in just yet. Why summon her all the way from her school in France just to get him unstuck from this window? Harry wasn't sure how Gabby would be able to do- or rather undo magic she hasn't studied yet, either. She hasn't been shown Finite Incantatem yet. She'd likely have to go get a trustworthy adult's help. Harry resolved himself to sit tight and work out his escape plan thoroughly.

"I shall leave you here for a short while. Enjoy the last few moments you have remaining with sight and sound available to you."

Harry could hear Snape turn and head for the stair.

"Oh, and let's take... one hundred points from Gryffindor."

As the Headmaster's footsteps faded below him, Harry seethed. He'd get out of this. He'd do it without Gabby's help if at all possible, but by Jeanne he was getting out of this.

...

Many, many kilometers to the south in Professor Royal's classroom at Joliebatons Academie, a little angel was bawling her eyes out. Nothing her teacher or her friends could do helped Gabby as she shuddered under the emotional assault through her bond with Harry.

She couldn't go to her Lord and she couldn't stop crying... and she couldn't say why.

Professor began to note that Gabby's eyes were glowing faintly just about the same time that the girl began to cry. She asked if Gabby was hurt or needed a healer. Gabby sobbed 'no'. After ten straight minutes of uncontrollable crying, Gabby was sent to the school healer's office anyway. Ten minutes later, her mother came to take her home.

-o\0/o-

"Hullo Justin. Colin." A dreamy voice called from behind the two boys.

"Hullo- errr, Luna?" The younger Creevey squeaked out, his voice breaking just a bit at her name.

She smiled and nodded. "It's good to see someone who knows how to keep the wrackspurts at bay in the house of lions."

Luna soon noticed that the Creevey brothers were not the only students who had suddenly joined her in the first floor hallway she was traversing. There were quite a few of them actually, and everyone was in their best robes. A few of the witches in the group were even wearing some rather elegant gowns.

"Surely you haven't all come to help me flush out a Blibbering Humdinger, have you?" Luna asked Justin hopefully. "I'm close tonight... a few extra pairs of eyes would really help."

"I'm sorry, Luna." Colin answered. "But we're all going out to the gardens to practice our etiquette and social skills and the like."

"You could..." Luna turned to Justin, who was working up a deep flush talking to her. "Y-you could come with us. I mean... It would be an honor if you would accompany me on a stroll through the gardens tonight, Miss Lovegood."

Luna's smile widened a little. Apparently someone had figured out she was a girl. Pity he was too young to help her fulfill her oath to Sirius. Alas...

"I'm afraid I must decline your generous offer Mister Creevey. I have a prior engagement to attend to." She dipped into a light curtsy. "Blibbering Humdingers don't catch themselves you know."

"Twenty points for spouting off worthless drivel, Miss Lovegood." The harsh voice of Headmaster Snape interrupted. "And ten from Gryffindor for listening to her, Mister Creevey."

All gossip and light banter around them stopped immediately. Luna stared at the floor, unable to meet the man's eyes.

The dirty blonde Ravenclaw flew from his presence, but Snape no longer paid any attention to her. "Lord Malfoy... please escort your charges outside. I shall supervise the dueling section tonight."

What Snape failed to mention aloud was that he had already bullied or Confunded any international auror who was likely to give him grief over it. The guard wouldn't be changed anytime soon, and hopefully there would be too much going on for them to worry about a small group of schoolchildren later on.

"Of course, Headmaster." Draco replied, though Luna was already too far away to hear.

-o\0/o-

"How goes the lesson?" Headmaster Snape asked over the soft tones of a magical string quartet.

Young Lord Malfoy and the Greengrass heiress took a small step apart instinctively. In truth, they had not been acting improperly. Perhaps this was a case of their thoughts betraying them? Tut. Tut.

"The students are progressing well, Headmaster." Draco responded. "I'm quite surprised by Mr. Finch-Fletchley. Though muggleborn, he does have an aristocratic background. Apart from his religious convictions, he would pass for a pureblood at most any function."

Daphne nodded in support. "Indeed. Miss Vane seems quite taken with him this evening regardless of his blood status."

Snape nodded, not that he meant any support for Mr. Flinch-Fletcher's social skills. "Miss Vane will learn to stick with her own kind soon enough."

The Headmaster looked into the darkness. Just beyond Black Lake's opposite bank, a couple of soft flashes could be seen flickering between banks of low lying fog. Some might mistake them for lightning or the work of forest creatures, but Snape knew otherwise. The castle's outermost auror patrols have encountered Voldemort's gift to Hogwarts. Those flashes of light were most likely patronus charms.

"Lord Malfoy. Miss Greengrass. Round up the chaperones and escort them inside."

Draco looked nervous. Daphne looked confused.

"Now." He all but growled before switching targets. "Miss White! Miss White, come here."

As the two moved off to collect the other pureblood chaperones, a half-blood prefect approached as requested.

"The student chaperones and I shall be discussing things inside. I trust you can maintain order while we are away?"

"Yes sir." The young witch nodded eagerly, happy for a chance to impress her Headmaster.

"Very well."

Snape turned and entered the nearest door. As soon as Draco and his assistants were through, Snape shut it and followed the motion with several locking charms.

"Sir?" Daphne asked uncertainly.

"To your common rooms." Severus answered. "All of you."

They were all confused by the order but none of them were foolish enough to cross Snape now... especially not Vane, the only Gryffindor in the group.

On his way to the main Magical Traditions meeting room, Severus took a moment to look out a window towards the astronomy tower.

There was a soft blue light glowing through all the upper windows. Snape frowned. It moved. Snape began to gnash his teeth in anger. The light was ring shaped.

A halo.

Severus bit back a curse that would have sent the nearest portraits running in shock. Harry's precious angel had come back to Hogwarts and the Headmaster was livid.

But wait. The light didn't mean that she was free, per se, or even that Harry had escaped his bonds. Severus bit back the urge to look again. If he didn't directly observe it then it may not have happened yet.

After checking to ensure that he was alone, he pulled out his time turner and gave it a spin.

-o\0/o-

Luna knew it was time for dinner. Past time, in fact, but she was determined to spot a creature or three tonight. The wrackspurts were very active as were several swarms of nargles. Perhaps if she were careful enough, she may spy a Blibbering Humdinger after all.

Luna adjusted her spectrespecs and followed the trail of wrackspurts from corridor to corridor, winding her way ever higher floor by floor. Things were looking up; these were elevations she believed such a rare creature might prefer. After all, were Humdingers to stick mainly to the ground floor of buildings then surely they'd be much easier to pin down.

...

Harry was pulled out of his internal ranting much earlier than expected when Severus came storming back into the observatory atop the astronomy tower.

"You worthless little shit! Do you really think you can get out of this?" The man was back and just as ghastly as before. "I'll have my hands

around that feathery little bitch's throat the moment she shows up, Potter! I'll snap her rotten neck and toss her out the window so you can watch her pathetic body fall to the ground!"

Harry may have been angry before, but he was furious that anyone would want to do harm to any little girl- and to say such things about his Gabby? A fire burned behind his eyes.

Snape spent a few more minutes mindlessly ranting before he went quiet. It wouldn't be too long before things began to happen. He was early, but that just meant he had a few more minutes to plan out his attack for when Potter finally made his move.

...

Up there. It had to be. Luna was amazed that the wrackspurt swarms were so heavy so far away from the other students. Clearly higher forces were at work. Luna followed the trail of wrackspurts to the very heights of the astronomy tower.

Perhaps if the trail went cold here, she could return to the Great Hall and get a bit of stew before the elves stopped serving dinner. All this searching was taking a lot out of her.

...

Footsteps. Bloody hell, who could it be? Harry hadn't told anyone to expect him here and there was a deranged dark wizard lying in wait for whoever showed their face. All he knew was that it wasn't his Angel. Harry surely would have known had she done something like this on her own.

"Harry, what are you doing up here?"

Bugger. It was Luna. Harry had no way of warning her off.

"Have you seen a Blibbering Humdinger up here today, Harry?" She drifted closer to the ghost in a way that few living could ever match. "Harry? Kneazle got your tongue?"

"No Miss Lovegood." A voice came from behind her. "I took it."

There was a slight pause.

"Good evening, Headmaster." Luna offered, her voice slightly higher than it was a moment before.

"Is it? I wonder." Came the man's answer. "Tell me, Miss Lovegood. What business does a Fourth Year Ravenclaw have at the top of the astronomy tower at this time of night on a Wednesday?"

"I- I was looking for a Blibbering Humdinger, Sir."

"Still claiming to search for your pathetic imaginary friends are you?" Clearly he did not believe her. "I could just look into your mind... but then where is the fun in that?"

"I don't unders-"

"Crucio!" Snape roared.

Luna fell to the ground shrieking in pain.

"I want to hear a better answer, Miss Lovegood. Why have you come up here? How did Potter contact you?"

"A-a-a -hic- h-he d-idn't-"

"Crucio!" The furious man roared again and this time he fought to hold the curse while also holding onto his own forehead.

Luna's scream was cut short when Snape found himself unable to continue the curse due to his own pains.

"How in Merlin's name are you doing it?"

He jabbed his wand at the quivering mass of witch on the floor. She had no answer and so he turned his wand at Harry.

"Is it you?" Snape shouted at the frozen ghost, still holding his head in his left hand.

Snape's single minded hatred was in rare form today. Even now, every dementor in all of the British Isles was coasting silently over the Forbidden Forest, and yet he cared nothing for them. The I.C.W. aurors patrolling the forests and lake meant nothing to him. The

lower born students who would soon be playing at being civilized out in the gardens meant less than nothing. Only hurting Potter and anyone Potter cared for meant anything to him.

"Let me show you the cost of these transgressions."

Snape turned his wand on Luna one more time.

"Avada-" God, no! "Kedavra!"

Harry saw green light reflect off the stones to either side of his frozen perch even if he couldn't see the curse itself. Deep inside, he cried out at his inability to find some way out of this sooner. Luna was far too good a person to die for him.

Even as the curse left his wand, Severus Snape had a horrible realization pass through his burning mind. He was about to kill Luna Lovegood. This wasn't a problem for him morality wise so much as it was a problem of logic. Didn't he see Luna alive? Earlier, or rather later, before this evening's trip through time? Just as the lower form of Magical Traditions students was leaving for their trip outside?

He did.

She was terribly frightened of him and she got away as quickly as she could. He could have Crucio'd her and still gotten that reaction if he treated her physical symptoms and Obliviated the rest. But then he had to let go to his inner demons and give her the Killing Curse. Death was stalking a girl that clearly couldn't die.

Bloody-

The curse hit it's target. As the very leading edge of green death magic made contact with Luna's skin, a horrible thing happened. Time itself reacted to Severus Snape's foolishness. At that precise point in space, time shifted and turned. The Killing Curse itself unraveled and a flaw in Existence reached out to connect with the man on the other side of that curse.

There was no time to react, not as people measure it. For one infinitesimal moment Luna was about to die and immediately afterwards Severus did die. His wand hit the floor and his corpse followed half a second afterwards.

Harry Potter disappeared.

-o\0/o-

A wordless cry rocked the room. Severus Snape shot off the floor and looked around.

He was standing at the base of an aisle nestled between row upon row of raised stone benches, all focused on a dais nearby. On that dais sat a majestic and intimidating stone arch filled by a thin veil. The veil itself seemed to be shifting about slightly due to some small breeze from within. There was also... whispering?

"Pretty, isn't it?" A voice called out from behind him. A very despised voice.

Potter! What are yo- But Snape's voice failed to respond to his command to speak. He tried to spin to face his hated enemy only to find that his body was similarly frozen in place.

"Ah, sweet revenge..." Harry mused aloud. "It seems to me that we have switched places, Snape."

The boy got up and walked past his former professor to stand next to the arch. He seemed content to listen to the whispers for a moment.

"Do you have any idea what this is?" Harry kept his eyes on the delicate seeming stone work. "Any idea how it was made?"

For the first time, Harry looked his former tormentor face to face.

"I do." Harry pointed a finger at the arch as he continued. "This is what happens when dark greedy bastards mess with a good thing. Oddly fitting that we should find ourselves here, don't you think?"

Once again, Snape was silent. Harry didn't really want to hear what the man had to say. After spending the last few hours of his existence frozen in front of this man, turn about seemed fair play.

"I could spend forever telling you about all the things you did wrong in your life, but I won't. Unlike you, I don't take pleasure in verbally

tearing down those who have offended me." Harry stepped back far enough to see both the arch and Snape at the same time. "But what I will say instead is that whatever you get from here on in, you bloody well earned it."

Just as Harry's voice dropped off, the veil under the arch began to tremble with repressed energy. The whispers became more urgent. Suddenly, the fabric of the veil shot out to surround Severus and pull him through.

Harry fought to keep from falling to the floor, he fought to stave off the dry heaves. It helped that he hadn't actually eaten anything in nearly a year. Even knowing what Snape was guilty of, actually watching that happen to anyone was deeply disturbing. Harry resolved to find out where on Earth this artifact was and make sure that no mortal man had any access to this room for any reason. The sooner the better.

Shortly after Harry left, a door into the room was forced open by mysterious grey cloaked wizards with wands raised high. They would find nothing. No dead child saviors, no damned prisoners, and no other physical or magical evidence that anything happened at all.

They would leave the Death Chamber in confusion, no closer to understanding the Veil than before. The biggest mystery held by the British Ministry of Magic would remain a mystery.

-o\0/o-

As soon as Harry returned to the astronomy tower, he moved closer to the girl who's torture and near murder set him free in the first place.

"Luna?" He whispered, pulling as close to her face as he could get.

She showed no signs of awareness though she did show signs of life. She was twitching in shock but at least she was breathing. There was a heavy sheen of sweat on her forehead and her eyes were half open. One of her eyes was red rather than white. An artery must have burst during her time spent under Snape's torture curse.

"I'm sorry Luna. Really I am." Harry said while pulling some damp bangs behind the girl's ear. "I should have stopped him sooner."

Harry wiped away a ghostly tear before straightening and calling out for help. "Dobby!"

-o\0/o-

Draco watched his group gather in the hall. The witches were coming back down from their dorms in twos and threes in their formal robes even though all of the wizards have been ready for some time. According to the chatter around him, this is one thing that the wizarding world has in common with the muggle one.

Even so, Draco was too nervous to build up an internal rant against there being any similarities between the two worlds. There would be an attack soon. He knew it. He knew it and he wanted out... but he couldn't escape Snape's control. Not yet.

He was only down by one student, a Ravenclaw Prefect, when someone unexpected burst into the hall. An older prefect slid to a stop in the middle of the stunned crowd and tried to catch his breath.

"Thomas? Will your girlfriend be making an appearance or not?" Draco asked of the wizard.

He shook his head in the negative and replied. "Haven't you heard? Snape's dead!"

There were several gasps in the crowd as teens became more interested in the news than their group date.

"What?" Draco managed.

"Dead!" Mr. Thomas repeated. "Lovegood is in the Hospital Wing. Snape attacked her... nearly killed her it's said... and Harry Potter carried her down from the astronomy tower!"

Draco stood and thought for a moment. The din of excited gossiping students threatened to overwhelm him, but he did his best to ignore it all. Snape was dead.

Draco shot a firework charm high into the air above everyone, restoring order in a heartbeat.

"This meeting is canceled! Return to your rooms!" Draco shouted.

Draco darted away to look for answers as noisy chaos returned with a vengeance.

-o\0/o-

Apolline kissed her Little Angel's forehead.

The girl only managed to fall asleep ten minutes ago after several hours of crying jags. She refused to even say why she was so upset. Momma was at her wit's end until just recently when the crying ended almost as quickly as it began.

Apolline laid down to rest beside her daughter. As she curled around Gabby, her black silk nightgown swirled over the little girl's light blue school robes. The poor dear was too distraught earlier to do anything more than kick off her shoes before falling into bed.

Apolline fell asleep almost as quickly as the nine year old did.

Fifteen minutes later, Gabby's eyes opened.

"I'm sorry Momma, but I have to go now." She whispered.

Little hands slipped out of her dozing mother's grip. Gabby carefully left her mother on the bed and dropped to the floor to begin putting her shoes back on. Gabby was very thankful that Momma and Poppa let her keep her wand with her all the time now. It was a security precaution, they said. It meant she wouldn't have to get into a warded jewelry box, was all she cared about.

Gabby tenderly kissed Momma on the forehead and snuck out of the bedroom. Poppa wasn't home, as usual, and she had little trouble making it to the other end of the house.

Back in Little Angel's bedroom, her mother's eyes opened. "Gabrielle?"

No reply. Down two flights of stairs, Gabby was getting to her knees to recite a small prayer.

"Zoé." Apolline called as she rubbed away the sleep.

-POP-

"Yes, Madame Delacour?"

"Where is Gabrielle?"

The little elf turned her head as if to check something before looking back at the lady of the house.

"She is in the lower study, Mistress."

Two floors down, Gabrielle was nearly done.

"... through you I know eternal love."

And with those words, Gabrielle threw her arms wide and spread her wings.

Apolline grabbed her wand and ran for the nearest staircase, having already leapt off the bed as soon as the telltale buzz of love and peace filled her house. An unauthorized angelic transformation after sneaking away from adult supervision could only have a handful of explanations and they were all bad as far as Momma was concerned.

I'm coming, my Lord! Gabrielle trilled happily, for after horrible torment Harry was finally calling her to his side. Really, she thought, he should have done it much sooner and avoided all the pain they felt.

Two pure white wings met above the angel's head, sparking a glowing light that quickly formed into a blue-white halo. The air began to hum around her. She drew her wand.

Gabby was about to pull the halo down to replace her home with Scotland when she stopped. Her Lord made a promise to a certain English girlfriend not long after his last big adventure... something about penciling her in for the next one.

Next stop, Beauxbatons! Toot tooooooot! Gabby chirped, hand on the imaginary whistle chord.

Just as the Delacour Express was building steam, the lady of the house flew through the hallway door and across the room, stopping with a knee on either side of Gabrielle's patent leather shoes and a tight grip around the angel's waist.

"Not without me, young lady!" Momma shouted into her Little Angel's ear.

Uh, ohhhhhhh.

Alas, it was too late. By the time Apolline had finished speaking, Gabrielle's halo was halfway down and still dropping. Beauxbatons' dining hall was eating up the space once filled by a cosy little office with wall to wall bookshelves and plush red carpet.

Gabby's halo hit the ground and dispelled. Now instead of the low hiss and pop of a warm fire, the air was filled with the gasps and whispering of a study group. And in the middle of the study group was a wide eyed Hermione Granger.

Little Angel locked eyes with the teen witch.

'Mione! Come on! Harry's doing his saving people thing and you said you wanted to be there next time he did that and he's doing it now and he called me and so you have to come now or you' are going to miss your chance!

Hermione didn't move. She almost didn't breath. To be fair, none of the other students near her were moving either. An angel just popped in with a Veela wrapped around her waist. If that wasn't shocking enough, the angel was wearing a school uniform and the Veela was wearing a curve hugging silk number that dropped sharply at the collar and had little of what one would call a bottom. And she was barefoot.

"Gabrielle!" Her mother hissed. "At least let me make myself a little more presentable before I am to be paraded in front of anymore strangers!"

Sorry, Momma, but we have to hurry. Harry needs me.

Having no more patience for troublesome children, Apolline swirled her wand downwards to lengthen her robe. She also made it less

sheer. Two nearby quills were then appropriated and transfigured into thin soled shoes that Apolline could still run in if the need arose. As the dozen or so students in front of Gabby and Apolline had yet to move, the Veela matron stepped up and grabbed Hermione by the arm.

"You have your wand on you, I trust?" Apolline asked.

"Yes." Hermione blurted, finally pulling out of the shock that Gabby's arrival created. "Yes! Let's go!"

As Apolline and Hermione both crowded around the little angel with outstretched wings, several school officials could be seen rushing into the room.

"I'm sorry Headmistress Maxime!" Hermione shouted across the dining hall. "But I've been called away on family business. I'll come back as soon as I can!"

A halo snapped into existence above the angel, Veela and witch. Hermione began shouting last minute advice to her study partners. Something about inverse cotangents.

Gabrielle's halo fell again, and she took the last step to reuniting with her Lord. She was excited. She would get to fight real demons this time!

End Chapter

Chapter Notes:

Time travel is tricky stuff. Doubly so if you try to screw it up just right. So many people spend chapter upon chapter desperately avoiding the deadly trap of paradox that I just had to run into one headlong without having the Earth explode as a result. I think it worked.

Revised: How come I didn't remember Percy and Penelopy would have been out of Hogwarts yet? Doh! I replaced them with two generic characters... not that their part in the drama was all that important to begin with.

Insert standard legal disclaimer and boilerplate notes here.

Note: There will be a few instances where I refer to Hogwarts Castle and it's rooms and features. I use as my inspiration a floor by floor plan/map of the castle available on the deviantart website that I tracked down in a general image search. These plans may not be canon, but I think they work fairly well.

...as seen previously on The Little Veela that Could...

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She was gonna fight real demons this time!

The Little Veela that Could

Chapter Twenty-four: Seraphim

Four broomriders held together in close formation. Their small group drifted slowly along with the winds, slowly floating over the forest canopy just below. If they strayed too high, then they would lose even that navigational aid. The clouds were low and heavy, and if it got any darker then the group would have to start making their own light or risk flying blind. A light dusting of snow came down and the temperature was falling quickly.

"Sergeant?" A witch on the right called, her words thick with fear and uncertainty.

Her sergeant was frowning. They all were. They were in harm's way and they damn well knew it. Sitting on the border between Hogsmeade Valley and unwarded muggle land, they were at the far edge of organized patrols... and they were currently on the outermost leg of their patrol route. The most vulnerable one.

The auror on the far left began to hold his head in his hands. "I... I think we've found them, Sergeant..."

"Chocolate." It was an order.

The lead broomrider already had a bar in his hands, its foil wrapper crinkled loudly in the near soundless environment. It was just as the witch took her first bite of her chocolate rations that dark a form began to emerge from the fog surrounding them. Then another. And another. Dementors.

"Jesus!" The one on the far left shouted.

None of his squad mates sought to censure him as they were all thinking the same thing. A giant swarm of evil bastards silently flew by on either side of the I.C.W. patrol.

"Dixon. Du Bois. Climb out of the swarm and see if you can get a head count on these fuckers to take back to HQ. Hicks and I will stay with them."

Tucking his chocolate into a breast pocket, the Sergeant pointed his wand upwards and began to cast the spell that would clear the path for Dixon and Du Bois.

"Expecto Pat-"

But that's as far as the man got before his broom exploded.

"York!" The witch yelled as she watched her sergeant fall into the mists below.

A dull red shaft of magical light shot up and between the three remaining broomriders, almost hitting one of them.

"Ambush!" The almost-victim shouted just as they heard their sergeant's body strike the forest floor.

All three kicked their brooms into motion and held their wands tight.

The dementor swarm shifted. They got closer. Sergeant York had their only dementor repelling medallion and he was now twenty meters below them on the forest floor.

"Bail!" One of them shouted, panicked.

All three rose up into the air like their lives depended on it. Truly, it was more than just their lives at stake.

After thirty seconds of rapid ascent, the clouds thinned out and three aurors could see each other again in the light of the moon. Due to the desperate nature of their retreat, they did not all pop out of the cloud cover at the same place; there was at least fifty meters between the witch and her two remaining companions. The dark haze of dementor exposure was beginning to fade as well.

"Dammit, Hicks!" The witch shouted, suddenly ashamed of leaving her sergeant behind. "What about York?"

"Is that his name?" A deep voice growled behind her.

Rather than lose time turning around, she kicked downwards on her broom. Dropping suddenly when most people dodge up would shake him... hopefully. Even as she tugged hard on her broom's handle for the tightest turn possible, flashes of colored light played off her features. Her two teammates were exchanging spell fire with someone.

"How rude!" The voice from behind her called.

He was more distant this time but not by far, and a woman had joined the chase if the accompanying giggle was any indicator. Having fallen back into the fog she turned to a random heading and took off as quick as she could manage. Icy winds bit into her skin and snowflakes caught in her eyelashes.

"Which one are you then?" That voice called again. She flinched and cut hard right. How in God's name was he following her through these clouds? "Dixon, perhaps? I believe the Dixon family is an old pureblood line from the American east coast. I do not recognize the name Du Bois as being pureblooded. He is a mudblood, isn't he?"

Dixon, as he had guessed correctly, tried to activate her emergency portkey. It didn't work. Time for desperate measures. She pointed her wand to the rear, not even sparing the time to aim, and shot off a pair of blind silent Reductor curses. He didn't reply with words. Oh, no. Unfortunately for Auror Dixon, what he did do was grab the end of her broom and yank it out from under her.

"None defy Lord Voldemort and live to speak of it!" He yelled as she free fell through the mists.

She was too disoriented in free-fall to attempt apparation, doubly so as happiness and logic both began to flee her. She was falling back into the dementor swarm.

No.

Not that.

Auror Dixon's last conscious act before she struck the ground was to pull a pin on her personal emergency anti-soul loss device. It was a grenade strapped into a bandolier across her chest and it went off seconds after she hit the ground. Mercifully, it also went off seconds before any dementors could get close enough to kiss her. Her spirit fled before they could take it.

The explosive report reached Lord Voldemort as he hovered broomless between the clouds. He looked down and scowled.

"Your death means nothing. You cannot keep my allies from feeding. They are hungry and I have promised them a great feast."

Two dark forms drew close to him on brooms.

"They did not escape, My Lord." One called. "Both fell to their deaths."

"And the first one? York?" The Dark Lord asked.

"Rodolphus has him, My Lord. He still lives."

Voldemort turned his gaze in the direction of Hogwarts Castle even though it was still well out of visual range.

"Take his medallion and let our 'friends' have him." He sneered.

"Yes, My Lord." The servant turned and carried out his Lord's command.

Soon.

Soon they would all suffer for their defiance. He cared not for how many he ruled so long as he ruled over all.

-o\0/o-

Harry stared into Luna's eyes. She was still trembling a bit, but her eyes didn't seem to shift under their lids. Probably not dreaming then, right? Harry wouldn't have felt right popping into her mind for a look around just then anyway, not with Pomfrey, Flitwick and those I.C.W. officials hopping about as they were.

"He cast the killing curse..." The man with gold lettering on his I.C.W. patch repeated, "...but Snape was the one that died when it hit Miss Lovegood, correct?"

Harry turned to look at the man.

"That's right, sir."

Harry saw the man glare. It was a hard thing to accept. After all, the last time this happened, Harry was involved that time too, only there was no Snape and no Luna. Just Harry, his mother and a Dark Lord.

"And how do you explain that?"

"I don't. I can't." Harry stared back just as hard as the officer. He wondered how long it would take before he was accused of killing Snape outright. Not that he didn't want to... it's just that he didn't.

"Perhaps this will help solve the riddle..." A higher pitched yet still male voice called out behind them.

Both man and ghost turned to see Professor Flitwick slowly levitating a small jeweled sandglass in a gilt housing out of the dead headmaster's robes.

"A time-turner?" Harry blurted out.

"What would you know of those, boy?" The officer stated, even more suspicious than before. "Those things are highly restricted."

"I came by my knowledge honestly." Harry defended himself while the professor and officer both looked on in interest. "Hermione got

one so she could get to every class offered in Third Year. Professor McGonagall got it for her. Dumbledore knew all about it, of course."

"I did wonder..." Flitwick seemed to drift off for a moment before coming back to the here and now.

The officer's glare turned to Flitwick though he said nothing. Harry began to think that using a time turner was not something the international crowd approved of. Come to think of it, the Delacours were quite surprised to hear about Third Year the first time Hermione told the tale. Shocked even. Harry thought it was all from the dementors and Sirius, but then it could have been more. At the time, Apolline was too overwhelmed to explain on a point by point basis why she tightly embraced Hermione and didn't let go for ten minutes.

"Soooooooo..." Harry started. "What if he was using it at the time? He could have... I don't know... broken one of those rules 'Mione was so strict over... yeah?"

Flitwick lowered the sandglass onto a nearby side table. The officer shook his head and reached out for it.

"We can't have that floating about." He said as he dropped it into a random pocket. "There's a reason those damn things are restricted. Anyways, that doesn't explain why you are here to begin with, kid. Shouldn't you be in France right now?"

"I have friends here, not that I need to explain myself to you." Harry was actually getting a bit peeved at this man. "Look, I was warned that something dangerous could happen tonight and I came to look after my friends. As it turns out, I was right to come. Snape Crucio'd Luna before he tried to kill her, or have you forgotten already?"

"And who warned you?" The man insisted. "I want to ask them a few questions."

"He doesn't want to go public," Harry said, unknowingly excluding half the school population, "afraid of retaliation and all that."

"One girl is tragic and all but I have all of Scotland to look over, boy." Harry really didn't like being called 'boy'. This man was supposed to

be a 'good guy' so Harry was trying to overlook his more pratworthy traits.

The officer looked to Flitwick. "Who is the new Headmaster?"

"Severus never identified a deputy, Captain. He claimed to have no the time to teach anyone about the castle wards." The diminutive Charms professor shook his head and sighed. "Hogwarts has no Headmaster."

The officer cursed heavily. "Please tell me there are dementor wards on the property."

"Sadly no." Flitwick shook frowned. "The Ministry has always maintained the right to place their guards where ever they saw fit. Hogsmeade Valley hasn't had dementor repelling wards in place since the Ministry made peace with the things all those centuries ago."

The Captain looked like he really wanted to curse more but the situation was too serious for it. "Order your staff to close all doors and windows in the castle. Lock them all. I don't give a shit who gives the order so long as it's carried out. My men will cover the Hogsmeade camp and this Castle as best we can, but it's not looking good right now. All non-essentials in camp will be sent away."

Flitwick nodded after a moment. "I'll have the students and the refugees sent into the dungeons. Hufflepuff and Slytherin dorms should be safe even if dementors do get inside. There are some hallways down there with very solid doors."

Headmaster or no, Flitwick began summoning school elves for door and window locking duty and they obeyed. He was a professor after all.

The Captain turned and left the Hospital wing without excusing himself. He had a valley defense to organize and souls to save.

Harry hovered alone and forgotten over Luna. Even Madam Pomfrey was able to ignore him and treat the broken girl beneath him. Not that he blamed her; he was beyond physical injury or pain.

Dementors. Harry thought to himself. Nasty buggers.

Nasty, yes, but not that hard to deal with if you know how. Harry turned inward. He turned his attention to Gabrielle.

Asleep? Wasn't it a bit early in the evening for that? Harry would have to check up on her more often.

A small mental nudge was sent down the bond. Gabby's eyes opened.

-o\0/o-

"Match to Weasley!" An older boy called out from the side.

Ginny stood victorious, chest heaving and sweat dripping down her face, as two Ravenclaw wizards pulled their comrade off the floor. The match judge held an open hand out to her. He wanted the loser's wand back.

Ginny looked at her trophy one last time before releasing the polished wooden shaft. It wasn't very pretty anyway. Not like her wand.

"Are you going to let someone else have a go at it, Ginny?" A girl to one side asked.

Ginny centered herself before answering. "You keep going until you lose. That's the rule tonight. It's not my fault your boyfriend isn't wizard enough to beat me."

The girl colored. Ginny had indeed just flattened the other witch's boyfriend and done so in record time. After beating three other opponents before him, even.

"No wonder you can't keep a boy interested..." The other witch muttered. It was meant just for her friends on the sidelines, but Ginny heard anyway.

"You'll just have to come up here and get rid of me yourself then!" The redhead hissed, nostrils flaring.

Her nameless challenger quickly backed into the crowd. Ginny was known for vengeful hexing, and she rated full wicked bitch status when angered. The other girl wasn't about to challenge a lioness on the hunt.

Before Ginny or anyone else could intentionally escalate the conflict the main doors opened and Draco stepped in, Daphne only one step behind.

"This meeting is over!" Draco shouted without preamble. "Back to your dorms. All of you!"

His call was met with many indignant shouts. The noise in the room rose dramatically and questions rang out from every corner.

"Sonorus." Draco intoned. "Headmaster Snape is dead!"

That got their attention.

"Go back to your dorms. This is a bad night to be about."

Many of the students immediately turned for their dorms. Some of them just stood in small groups and gossiped about what all this could mean.

Others wouldn't have it.

"Ginevra." Draco drawled as the still panting girl came right up to him.

"What's going on?" She demanded.

Her brothers were also interested, and standing right behind her, but they weren't the only ones. There were others listening in behind them.

"Headmaster Snape attacked Lovegood in the astronomy tower. Potter was there." Gasps. "Snape's dead now and Potter's got Lovegood in the Hospital Wing."

Ginny's features set. "Right then."

She pushed her way past Draco and Daphne and walked straight out the doors.

"Your dorms are the other way..." Draco muttered. "Bloody lion."

"Yes, old chap..."

"...our dormitories would be to the left..."

"...if she or we weren't going to see Ickle Harrikins..."

"...mustn't forget Ickle Lulu..."

"...Merlin forbid..."

"...so to the right it is!"

Gred and Forge nodded as one and followed Ickle Gin-Gin out and to the right. Ron didn't bother to explain, he just followed. As did Neville... and Susan... and Cedric and the Patil sisters and Head Girl Chang. Everyone else either went the expected direction or milled about.

Draco was about to be more forceful with the ones who just stood there when a house elf -pop-'ed into the room.

"Duffy is being terrible sorry, but the students is being told to head to dungeons. Ravenclaws is to be going into Slytherin dorms and Gryffindors is being going to Hufflepuff. This is being ordered by Professor Flitwick. There is being no time for dawdling about."

The elf fidgeted, nervous at having to tell students what to do for the first time in its life. As soon as the last students began to head out, the elf -pop-'ed away again.

Draco exited the door and turned right. Daphne noticed.

"Potter?" She asked.

"Potter." He replied.

She followed.

-o\0/o-

In a Hogwarts tower overlooking the greenhouses, an I.C.W. sentry spotted something. The sentry pulled out a mirror.

"Tower East to Control." The cloaked wizard intoned. "Spellfire at zero-six-seven degrees. Range two-zero-zero-zero. Altitude five-zero."

As the warning came in and the alarm spread, the watch captain would find that two patrols were late for their check in. One on the east wall and one at the far eastern edge of the valley. A third was set to cross through the sighting's location but was not due to check in for some time yet. Squads were sent to investigate all three instances on brooms. Fighting spread. There were dementors and dark wizards advancing together.

The alarm became a call to general quarters. Hogwarts prepared for battle.

-o\0/o-

"We is being ready to move Missy Lovegood, Harry Potter." An elf called at the foot of Luna's bed.

Harry nodded and watched silently as two elves levitated his friend's bed into the air and Madam Pomfrey ordered elves to move various potions and artifacts into the dungeon several floors below.

There was a disturbance at the door.

"Harry!" Ginny shouted.

Those who went right instead of left at Magical Traditions were now filling the Hospital Wing door.

"Hey, Gin." Harry replied without taking his eyes off the unconscious blonde.

"What happened, mate?" Ron asked over his sister's shoulder.

"Snape happened..." Harry ground out. "But that's over and done with. He won't be bullying anyone ever again."

Harry moved a lock of Luna's hair before turning around to greet his friends.

"Er..."

That was more people than he expected to see honestly. The twins were just about to comment on Harry's smooth reception when Madam Pomfrey beat them to it.

"Out of the way, you lot! I have a patient that needs to be transferred." The healer called in no uncertain terms.

Sadly for the healer's personal well being, someone else chose that time to enter her territory unannounced. A small point of blue-white light with an accompanying ringing tone appeared half-way between Harry and his guests. It appeared two meters off the floor and it both expanded and dropped to the ground at the same time.

"... 'z' plus 'l' over 'z'!" Hermione yelled at the floor, hoping that her last few words would make it under Gabrielle's halo and into France. She wasn't sure it would work. After all, she herself wasn't in France anymore.

Whether those last words made it to France was anyone's guess, but they certainly made it to Hogwarts.

"Woah, 'Mione!" Ron blurted. "When did you get so bloody good looking?"

Hermione may not have been wearing the jacket and cloak that was standard for travel, but she was wearing her proper uniform blouse and skirt... with the heels and stockings to match... and she still had her hair in a tight French braid. Quite flattering, all told.

Of course, there was an angel in the room now, too. She was also wearing her school uniform. Very cute. And then there was Apolline, who could make a burlap sack look hot. Her modified sleepwear was much racier than a burlap sack.

Angel, muggleborn and Veela all uncoiled from each other before Hermione responded.

"I must admit I find this much more flattering than my old Hogwarts uniform." Hermione sniffed and preened a bit.

Yes, Beauxbatons has had an effect on the girl. Parvati couldn't wait to tell Lavender.

Then Hermione saw her sister.

"Luna!" She ran to the injured witch's side.

"I understand your concern, Miss Granger," Madam Pomfrey interrupted, "but Miss Lovegood really must be escorted out of the wing now. Please stand aside. Once we are clear of the doors you may follow or stay here as pleases you."

All of the new arrivals parted quietly so that the elves could bring Luna's bed through as requested. Surprisingly, Harry failed to follow the bed out. This lead to all the others staying with him even if it was clear that Hermione, Gabrielle and Apolline very much wanted to follow Luna.

"Aren't we here for Luna?" Hermione asked Harry.

She had that tone of voice that clearly only allowed for one answer.

Harry looked through a nearby window. "Unfortunately, no."

Harry spoke in a voice that Hermione also understood clearly. It was one of those 'saving people' things.

"Fine then." She returned quickly. The others went silent so that Hermione and Harry would work out whatever it was that they had going on. "What are we here for then? We've already done trolls and a cerberus..."

Ron took up the torch, "...and a bloody great snake..."

"...dirty rats..."

"...and swarms of dementors..." Fred and Gorge added.

"... mustn't forget the dragon." Ginny finished.

Sure, there were other things, but as they were generally darker even than what was brought up, everyone seemed to know what not to say. Mentioning the snake was bad enough as far as Ginny was concerned.

"Don't I even rate?" Draco asked, hand in the air.

"Against a dragon?" Fred asked, or was it George?

Harry cut them off. "Dementors."

"Harry, mate." Ron almost whined. "We've already done that one. Old news."

"All of them I expect." Harry added. "Not just a dozen or a hundred of them. We're about to witness a full assault on Hogwarts."

It was a more of a guess on his part, but then why else would the I.C.W. captain be so concerned if it were just a few of the nasty blighters. He knew first hand how large the auror presence here was and for them to get panicky it must be bad.

"And we come to Hogwarts now?" Apolline hissed. "You endanger us all!"

Were it not for Little Angel's calming presence, Apolline may have already changed to voice her true displeasure at Harry. With fire.

"Gabby." Harry ignored the older woman and focused on his Angel. "There are a lot of people in this Castle. I want to protect them. Are you okay with that?"

Yes! ... "No!"

Hermione tensed at the argument. Daphne's grip on Draco's arm also tensed at the same time. Second and third languages were the rule rather than the exception for traditional families like hers. Why else would international students sit with Ravenclaw and Slytherin over the other houses? Because that way they had someone to talk to, of course.

Momma. I want to do this. The little angel chirped. This time she kept eye contact and made sure only Momma understood her. I will

make my Lord proud. I will fight the bad things. I will make them go away. That's what real angels do, Momma.

Apolline swallowed hard and fought to keep her tears back. She wanted her little baby to go home and stay there, but this was beyond her and she knew it. Her little baby was far more than a little baby. Not even ten years old, and Little Angel's already made a name for herself in the grown-up world. Several of them, actually. Apolline's been doing what she could to keep Gabby from hearing some of the things they call her now. Gabrielle certainly didn't need to know that a new shrine to the Angel Gabrielle now stands near Jeanne's home in Domrémy-la-Pucelle.

"I would never ask Gabby to do anything that she couldn't do." Harry pleaded. "I will be with her the whole time."

I can do this, Momma. I can! Gabby chirped.

Apolline turned to the ghost that held her daughter's life, heart and soul in his hands. "If she gets hurt..."

"Then I will come back to life just so that you can kill me yourself." Harry finished for her. "Over and over again."

"Okay!" Hermione sought to grab everyone's attention now that the impasse was resolved. "So, Harry... do you have a plan already or is that why I'm here?"

Harry was about to say that he really just wanted to go outside with Gabby, beat up the dementors and go home... but he suspected Hermione wouldn't be too impressed with the simple elegance of his plan. Time for a bit of quick revising.

"Well..." Quicker- before Hermione could say anything more. "If you think my Patronus was something special then you haven't seen an angel cast one before. Gabby and I will be focusing on the dementors themselves- so if those of you who are willing to lend a hand would kindly watch our backs until we're done then that would be great."

"Watch your backs for what?" Ginny asked.

"Whatever shows itself that isn't a dementor." Harry answered. "Had to deal with Snape already today... probably won't be the only dark bastard out and about tonight."

There was a brief pause.

"I'm in." Hermione stated firmly.

"Absolutely, mate!" Ron cheered.

The twins chimed in. In tandem, of course. So did Ginny. Surprisingly, the non-Weasleys were similarly supportive as well.

"I've got your back, Harry." Cedric affirmed.

"I'm with you!" Susan tacked on.

"I'll do it." Neville said quietly, but he said it just the same.

"As will I." Cho added.

"And I." "And I." Padma and Parvati chorused, just out of step with each other. Not all twins were like the Weasley twins.

Apolline didn't bother with a reply. Her presence was a given. Required, even.

"Draco?" Harry took a good look at the Slytherin prince and his princess. "Is fighting off dementors the Slytherin thing to do?"

"Something tells me your merry band would be more comfortable if I weren't a part of it." Draco smiled slyly. "Besides, someone has to warn the other students. I think I know a seventh Year or two who learned the Patronus. Several Ravenclaws had a terrible fit after getting shown up by a Third Year Gryffie when you shot off that stag in the middle of a quidditch match."

"Even getting a mist would be helpful if any dementors do manage to get past us. A few first timers might get lucky, too." Harry returned. "Please spread the word for me."

Draco nodded and turned to leave. Daphne nodded as well and followed young Lord Malfoy out of the Hospital Wing. She may have

seemed the perfect picture of poise and decorum, but inside her heart was hammering and her nerves were frayed. The proper young witch knew quite well she had no business dealing with dementors and the like.

"So what's our next move, Harry?" Ron asked.

Harry looked around. There were far too many windows in the Hospital Wing for his liking.

"I think it's time to say hello to Myrtle." Harry said as he turned for the door.

"Myrtle?" Hermione asked.

"And get brooms." Harry continued.

"Brooms!" Ron liked this move.

"Dobby!" Harry shouted.

-POP-

"Dobby is here, Harry Potter Sir!"

"Please fetch 'Miones broom-"

-POP-

-POP-

"Here it is, Harry Potter Sir!"

Dobby proudly handed over the mirror gloss elf spit-polished shaft. Harry Potter Sir's Missy 'Mione's Firebolt. Precious, it was.

"Brilliant, Dobby."

Harry smiled warmly as both elf and ghost watched Hermione take command of the magical speed machine. Behind them, Apolline called for Zoé and Virginie to collect brooms for everyone else.

"Now you're just having me on." Ron challenged. "I can understand 'Mione getting hot as she fills out... she wasn't half bad lookin' at the ball-" That bit got both Patil girls frowning. "-but there is no way that she ever gets into flying, mate. Much less on a Firebolt. That thing's way too much broom for her."

Hermione stared down Ron with such fire behind her eyes that Harry half wondered if she was part angel herself.

"Harry?" Hermione called in a deceptively smooth tone.

"Yes, love?"

"Race you to Myrtle?" Several brows rose at the challenge.

"Absolutely!" Harry crowed. "Rules?"

"No passing through walls, doors or floors." Hermione answered. She also brought up her shoes one at a time and transfigured the dress pumps into trainers.

"Of course." Harry replied. "Gabby, dear. Give us a countdown will you?"

This is gonna be great! Little Angel chirped.

Then she looked back over her shoulders at her neatly folded wings. Too bulky. She reverted to human form which was a real treat for those like Cho and the Patils who hadn't seen Gabby change before.

"Now I won't block the door!"

Gabby shouted before getting between the racing couple and their first turn, a rather sharp left that should favor the specter due to maneuvering room issues. She held both hands high.

"Three..."

Hermione used her wand to cut a slit on her skirt for more range of motion before throwing one leg over her broom to mount it. The auto-hover charm held her weight. The cut skirt showed a delightful hint of stocking and smooth skin. Brilliant.

"Two..."

Harry went down into a runner's stance. Gabby stood on the balls of her feet.

"One..."

The room was dead quiet.

"Go!" Gabby swished her hands down to the floor and ghost and broomrider shot off their marks.

A transparent blur disappeared around the door frame first, but Harry wasn't the one who got the best crowd reaction.

"Bloody hell!" Ron shouted. "She corkscrew turned in the middle of a school corridor!"

Ginny hit her prat of a brother over the head for cursing in an angel's presence, but she did appreciate his words. Their brave yet boring bookworm was an altogether different creature now than she was before.

"Yeahhh..." Cedric puffed up. "I taught her that one."

"Get her, Harry!"

Gabby ran out into the corridor only to stop before vanishing down the hall.

"Hey- don't shoot them they're my friends!" Gabby yelled to surprised aurors who just got buzzed by a ghost and a flying witch. Luckily, her admonishment worked. She turned around to stick her head back in the room. "Ummm... can some else be line leader? I don't know where we're going."

...

Outside the cold stone walls of Hogwarts, forces were converging. The far banks of Black Lake were aglow with spellfire and the occasional stream of tracer rounds. A Patronus would emerge from mist and shadow to push back at the darkness only to have its caster fall under assault from the dementors' human escorts. The

aurors fell back. All too soon, there was no forest to the rear and what little forest lay beneath the defenders was alight with flame. Cold deep water and icy shores was all that stood between skirmishers and the castle. No one wanted to fall into Black Lake where it would be a race between nature and beast to see who could claim the unfortunate soul first.

At the appropriate signal, all I.C.W. forces fell back to the castle proper. They swarmed into tower windows and ground level gates, all taking refuge behind crenellated stone walls and window frames. The towers themselves became hardpoints; bastions of wand and steel. Inside the castle, every stair and corridor was watched. Without proper siege wards in place, and that bastard Snape all but ensured that such wards could not be brought up in time, any window or door to the outside was suspect. In spite of the I.C.W.'s seeming numerical superiority, they had a lot of ground to cover. Both at Hogwarts and Hogsmeade.

The dementors still came. Control medallions were effective when used properly yet the vast majority of wizards trained in their use died when Hogsmeade was cleansed of its sin in the blue-white flames of the Angel Gabrielle.

Hovering above the far shores of Black Lake, Voldemort signaled to his most trusted servant.

"Yes, My Lord?" Bellatrix asked.

"You are my insurance." The Dark lord called. "Be ready."

Bella bowed from the seat of her broom and turned sharply and retired from the field.

With a regal swipe of his wand bearing hand, the Dark Lord ordered his forces into the attack. The real battle was about to begin.

At a range of one thousand meters, a handful of the shadows backlit by burning forest seemed more animated than the main hoard. They stood out. They seemed more human. That helped a lot.

The air between castle and hoard was split by the harsh buzz of muggle weapons of war. Bright flashes and glowing red lines flowed out from several points along the castle's upper reaches, a

testament to the volume of hot metal being thrown at targets at the rate of thousands of rounds per minute. Sniper rifles and heavy machine guns were aimed at anything that wasn't a dementor and several Death Eaters fell almost immediately. Sadly Voldemort's forces soon masked their presence amidst the hoard and cast the Impervius Charm on anyone who hadn't already used it. The inexperienced and weak had been culled. Those that remained were as ruthless and deadly as their dementor allies. Silence fell over school grounds as the last echos of gunfire faded.

At least Hogwarts was still out of range of any worthwhile combat spells for a short time. Only a true magical scholar and adept like the Dark Lord would have any control beyond a few hundred meters and most magics fell well short of a hundred.

...

Harry lost. He lost a broom race. To Hermione. Worse yet, she was riding his very own Firebolt.

"She got me on the straightaways." Was all he could say to explain his loss.

To be quite honest, the ghost was very proud of his witch and more than a little excited by her performance. There was a reason he fancied Cho before he died and it wasn't just that she was pretty. She was a seeker, a lover of flying like him. And now Hermione fit the same category, not that he didn't already love her for other things but a shared love of flying was just icing on the cake. Harry was sure 'Mione's performance on the Beauxbatons racing team would be top shelf soon enough.

Of course, Ron would never let Harry forget this most horrible of sins... and Hermione was understandably pleased with herself. Even when Ginny taunted her about the grin she had after 'riding Harry's shaft and riding it hard', she still didn't stop grinning. In fact, Hermione may have gotten an idea of how to comfort the loser from Ginny's choice of taunting subjects. Her smile just kept growing.

Sadly, the merciless teasing of Harry for losing his race with Hermione was rudely interrupted by harsh pops and loud buzzing noises coming from outside the castle.

"What's all that then?" Neville asked.

He was a pureblood. Of course he didn't know.

"Gunfire." Apolline answered. "I'm not happy with how quickly it all stopped either."

"I'm going to take a look outside." Harry said, eyeing the window. "Myrtle, be a dear and check the hall, would you?"

They had already spelled the door shut as firmly as the students, Apolline and three elves could make it.

"Will I be getting more roommates tonight?" Myrtle asked. All the activity was giving her hope and lifting her spirit.

"Not likely," Hermione answered the ghost, "Dementors take the souls of their victims, you know. Should the worst come to pass, you will be far more lonely than before."

"Oh. Drat." Myrtle looked crestfallen as she went to check the hall. She was only just getting used to interacting with the living and the idea that it could all fall apart again was quite distressing.

It took Harry about thirty seconds to fly out the window, rise out of the main courtyard and take a look around before coming back in again. Myrtle was done in half the time.

"The halls?" Harry asked her.

"Still clear- save the Spaniards at the corner. They still don't care for me either." Myrtle responded.

Harry appeared to take a deep breath, and more than one of his friends took real breaths in anticipation.

"Alright Gabby." He looked at his Angel. "It's time."

She alone showed no signs of fear or nervous tension. Her Lord wanted her to do this, so she would. It was that simple.

"I can't begin to imagine what your Poppa will think. Why, the aurors may have already told him we are here." Apolline moaned. She bit

back a sob and fell onto her Little Angel. "I'm so scared for you, my baby."

"Don't cry Momma." Gabby whispered back. She wrapped her arms around her mother and then she wrapped her wings around her mother too. I will take away your tears, Momma. I will steal them from you and you won't ever be sad ever again.

Love filled the room and Apolline's tears stopped falling. Little Angel didn't make false promises.

Gabrielle slowly pulled free of her mother and stepped into the center of the room. She drew her wings together above her head and formed her halo anew.

Harry didn't have to call to her any longer, nor did she need his spirit to enter her to build her up from within, for he was with her. She felt his love and knew his will. Rather than call for his bonded, he called for his friend.

"Dobby?"

"Yes, Harry Potter Sir?" The elf was already waiting at Harry's side and did not need to pop in this time.

"Please open the window for us."

Dobby smiled and bowed. He loved how Harry always asked or said please when he could easily order Dobby about. With a simple wave of Dobby's hand, the window vanished. Gabrielle hopped forward and drew down her wings. Two wing beats later, she stood on the stone sill between open air and Myrtle's bathroom.

"Like we agreed, 'Mione."

Harry ran his hand over the young witch's cheek. She nodded.

"We'll give you a minute to clear the window. Once Gabby's out in the open, we cross the roof to the rear and slip around to hide under the west ground floor bridge until you give us a signal." Hermione recited dutifully.

"Remember warming charms. And if her halo seems to flicker a bit as I expect it will, you look away until that settles down." Harry added.

"You still haven't told us why..." Hermione hinted that she'd like to know the answer.

"It's like that saying I used to hear on the telly sometimes... 'do not look directly into the light'."

Hermione's eyes opened wide. "Surely not..."

"You'll have to see for yourselves- but remember; if things don't look good, sneak out to Hagrid's and then on to Hogsmeade by way of the forest edge. They shouldn't be able to spot you in the dark."

"It'll be hard enough to spot ourselves, mate." Ron added. "Let's just hope this is all just 'Mione being over-prepared again."

"From your mouth to God's ears, Ron." Cedric added.

Gabrielle looked at Harry. Despite her best efforts not too, Hermione did as well.

Harry turned once more to the angel in the window, whom he was already with even if the others didn't know about it, and he nodded.

Go now.

With each succeeding beat of her wings a nine year old angel rose ever higher into the open air above the castle's courtyard. Her one companion, her Lord, followed silently in her wake. Behind her, friends and loved ones slipped up and around the castle in an effort to reach their staging area unseen. She turned to the east and was witness to a dark cloud approaching Hogwarts over the shores of Black Lake.

New targets sighted.

It was a thought shared by more than one person when Gabrielle and her spectral companion cleared the roof line. Aurors charged with defending the castle began to report to their Captain that a very famous 'non-combatant' was stepping in. Requests to break cover

and grab the youngest Delacour were flooding the communications network. Within the ranks of the invading hoard, a Dark Lord smiled. He welcomed the would-be savior, the little girl who is faithfully following in Harry Potter's footsteps. He had plans for her.

Surprisingly, his allies did not confer with the Dark Lord before charging forward.

The dementors saw her and instinctively they knew what her halo meant; they knew what she was. They left their wizard allies behind in a drive to meet a natural enemy, for that was what angels were to them. Hundreds of soul eating dark beasts shrieked as one and turned to bring their full numbers to bear as quickly as possible. Darkness sought to smother the light before it could grow.

Even as a full race of dark creatures rose to meet her, Gabrielle's very being hummed in anticipation. In the presence of her Lord under the ethereal glow of her halo, Gabrielle could not be intimidated. They were bad. They were bad and she would teach them a very big lesson. She would make the world a better place.

Gabby. Harry called her without words. Show me your new trick. Show everyone.

I will! Her cry answered the rising shrieks of the dementors, beasts who had no business making any noise at all.

Gabby's left hand rose, fingers reaching to grasp the halo above her directly. The humming circlet of magical flame was an extension of her being and she knew it as well as she knew her own body or the mark bestowed upon her forehead by Harry's lips. Little fingers found their target and wrapped around it. Blue-white light broke its form and flowed over her arm, her body and then her clothes.

Her magic flared and night became as day.

The creatures of darkness who now stood only a few scant meters away from Gabrielle cringed back. Every living being in line-of-sight with Gabrielle turned away unable to gaze upon her image. The dementor charge shuddered to a halt.

Gabrielle drew her radiant wings back and she rocketed into the nearest group of dementors. Her avian heritage was never more on

display before than it was right now. She was a predator amongst prey... prey who were as yet too stunned to scatter like the cockroaches they really were.

She didn't stop at the first dementor. No. She went through it. And through the next one and then through the one after that. Her body shined like the surface of the sun, and to the dementors her touch was no less deadly. Her arms and wings cut directly through the fiends and their remains fell burning to the snow covered shores below. Shrieks of anger turned into cries of pain and death.

They began to turn... their attack broken against her angelic corona. They began to flee.

Where are you going? Gabrielle cried into the swarm. I'm not done with you! You can't go!

Gabrielle drew her wand and pointed it into a group of dementors who seemed intent on escaping.

Stop!

And they did. Just as she caused the flames of her first failed spell to freeze, so too did she lock the dementors before her into place. As they were unable to evade her, she ran them through by the dozen.

All sound ceased save that of wind and wings... and the dull thud of dementor bits hitting the ground below. Neither the aurors nor the dark wizards could manage an offensive action due to Gabrielle's blinding glory. Voldemort and his pureblood followers actually fell back to the far shore. No matter how aggressive their desires, being unable to gaze upon their foe made it difficult to strike at her and hovering helplessly over Black Lake was neither intelligent nor cunning. For even with all of the people and creatures in Hogsmeade Valley, Gabrielle may as well have been alone.

Except for Harry, for he was with her. Twice even. Harry's spirit was within her and also without. As he was the only soul present who could look upon her he took full advantage of that fact. Left! Harry commanded, and his angel swooped into another group of her prey at his direction. Time and time again, she tore through groups of dark creatures only to line herself up and strike again. Gabrielle's

magic net didn't catch all of the dementors, but it did catch a great many of them and she did manage to run down many more as they fled. After a time, neither she nor her Lord could make out another dementor in need of her embrace.

That's all of them Angel. Let's go back to your Momma and 'Mione. They must be terribly worried about you. Harry called.

Okayyy! She squeaked.

Little Angel turned back to the castle and began to glide down to the nearer of two bridges spanning between the two main castle wings. Momma, 'Mione and the others should still be under cover nearby.

Halfway through her lazy flight back, Harry suggested she release the power which glowed about her. Somewhat embarrassed that Momma and Hermione and her friends and the 'good guys' still couldn't gaze upon her, Gabrielle did as she was told.

Day became night once more as Little Angel's glory dimmed. She gave the sky back to the Moon and stars.

As Gabrielle's feet touched stone once more, life returned to Hogwarts Castle.

"GABRIELLE!" Momma screeched as she dropped off a broom and onto the bridge next to her daughter.

Little Angel soon found herself at the center of a crushing hug. Momma was shaking like a leaf.

"How can you say that I will never be sad if you continue to do such things?" Apolline cried onto her little girl's shoulder.

As mother and daughter reconnected under the blue-white glow of Little Angel's halo, Harry turned to face the others.

"That turned out rather well, I think..." He offered.

More light spilled over the bridge as the doors at either end were pushed open. I.C.W. aurors were clearly intent on finding out just what the hell was going on. In a move that confused Harry, they stopped short of actually exiting the doorways for some reason.

Harry watched as Hermione, Ron and the others tried to think of something to say that suited the occasion. Clearly even Hermione was having trouble. He expected that one or two might be speechless after Gabby's performance, but all of them? Hold on... Hermione wasn't looking at him. Not at Gabby or her mother either.

And that wasn't joy or wonder filling her face. Even in the dim light available, he could still see that. It was... alarm? Her arm was pointed down, but she still had wand in hand. A few steps away, Cedric stepped in front of Susan and the twins edged closer to their sister. Harry opened his mouth to speak again, only, he couldn't. He couldn't move... he couldn't move!

Suddenly alert, Gabrielle jerked in her mother's arms. Momma! Let go!

"Imperio." A harsh voice growled behind Harry.

Momma! Little Angel struggled, but for all her magical strength, she was still only nine. Her small frame was no counter to a woman grown and under the power of the Imperius Curse.

A dark form stalked past Harry. It had an uneven gait and there were odd bumps distorting the cloak just behind its shoulders. A Dark Lord was among them.

"Boo!" Voldemort shouted, slamming one booted heel down on the stone at his feet. More than one of the students before him flinched back. "Pathetic..."

Harry saw some activity at the door behind his friends, and he wasn't the only one to notice. Voldemort drew his wand up for all to see. The tip glowed a very familiar and unwelcome green.

Gabrielle's struggles became more frantic. Momma, no!

"Unless you want these children to die, you will turn back!" Voldemort bellowed at the aurors to their rear.

Unwilling to risk innocents, the aurors at the door fell back. With a swipe of his wand, Voldemort closed the door. He then turned to do the same to the door on the far end of the bridge. It was no great

leap of logic to expect aurors to take to the skies and watch him from a distance... which was why the sky quickly lit up with spellfire even as the Dark Lord stared down the children whose lives he just threatened. The I.C.W. was learning the hard way that Voldemort did not re-cross Black Lake alone.

Even as random spells struck the bridge around them and bodies began to fall from the sky, Voldemort ignored the carnage. Instead, he chose to taunt the students before him, students he knew well.

"Miss Granger. I am told that Potter would not have lasted even half as long as he did at Hogwarts were it not for your support." She didn't look too flattered. "We will have words about your poor decision making skills another time, I promise you that."

Voldemort's threat caused the girl to go pale, but he was already done with her and on to a new target.

"Ahhhhh, Ginevra..." He drawled. "This past year can't have been good for you, dear. Why don't you tell me all about it... pour your heart and soul into it... I've listened to your troubles before, have I not?"

Ginny took two steps backwards before bringing up her wand. "You stay away from me!"

The Dark Lord glared at her. "Such atrocious manners. So disrespectful. Perhaps I should take you over my knee."

Ginny was backed into a corner. She was badly shaken, furious that Tom should ever speak to her again. She lashed out.

"Reducto!"

Red light shot out of her wand. Voldemort said nothing. He didn't need to. A quick swipe of his yew and phoenix feather wand was all that was required to bounce the curse right back to the very witch it came from. With a sickening crack, Ginny's right shoulder blew open and she collapsed in a pool of her own blood.

"Bloody bastard!" Ron cried, his voice mixing with his sisters pained moans.

It was a fight or flight instinct that caused every other teen on the bridge to raise their wands. It was surely no thought that this cruel thing before them would be an easy target.

Voldemort shouted and threw his wand forward sending all ten of his young opponents tumbling backwards. He didn't kill them. No. That would be too easy. Wanted to play with them as Harry and little Gabrielle watched helplessly, unable to do anything about it.

Of course, as soon as he had Apolline under his control, he ignored the girl and her mother completely. It was perfectly reasonable to think that a grown woman would be able to control her young daughter. What was not perfectly reasonable was to expect said woman to control her young Angel daughter.

Not that Voldemort knew this of course. Nor anyone else for that matter.

As soon as Voldemort turned away from his two most prized captives to play with the teens, Harry focused. The situation was not good... but it wasn't hopeless either. His bond to Gabrielle still held. His spirit was still with her and so long as he was with her Gabrielle would not panic. She would not play the part of a helpless victim.

Angels don't get saved. They do the saving.

It was clear to Harry and Gabrielle that Momma could not break the slavery curse on her own merits, so Gabrielle would have to do it for her. She stopped struggling against her mother, preferring to stare into the woman's eyes instead.

Momma's eyes were cloudy. Dull. For a Veela, this was unacceptable. Gabrielle cooed softly to her mother. Momma. Come back to me Momma. I need you.

Momma didn't move. Her gaze did not waver. Gabrielle tried harder.

Little Angel focused on her most recent lessons, the ones on how to focus her magic through her eyes... on how to affect just one person instead of a room full of them. It was a skill taught to Gabrielle to keep random students from commenting on her glowing blue eyes but it could also do other things.

Moooooooo-mmaaaaaaaaaa...

Gabrielle cooed softly. Hopefully too softly for a certain Dark Lord to hear or care for. She concentrated on pushing her thrall into the enchanted Veela and only the enchanted Veela. She pushed all the love that she felt for her Momma into the effort. Harry felt Gabrielle's magic- he felt her intent- and offered his love to build upon hers. Between Veela mother and Angel daughter, softly glowing crystal blue eyes flared with love and power.

She connected.

Apolline started.

As an Angel welcomed her Veela mother onto the 'good guy' side once again... and as the night sky above was filled with the sounds and sights of battle... Voldemort backed Ginny into an emotional corner causing her to lash out.

Red light flew across the bridge and then back again, and mother and daughter pulled away from each other. Much as she loved her little girl, Apolline pushed all of the love she had just experienced out. She expelled it and willingly fell into the fury of a woman forced to attack her own family. Her own daughter!

When Ron cried out in rage, so too did Apolline. As he drew his wand, she abandoned hers. She was no duelist. She was Veela. She drew upon her heritage, shedding her socialite looks for the frightening wings and claws of her race. As ten school children were thrown about like rag dolls, Apolline summoned bright orange fireballs into both palms.

Just then, the self-satisfied beast turned to address his captives. Satisfaction fell to surprise and anger as twin torrents of fire poured into his position. He rolled aside allowing Apolline's rage to tare lines of flame into the heavy wooden doors of Hogwarts. Voldemort returned fire.

"Avada Kedavra!" He hissed, and a green bolt of death rocketed down the bridge.

As Apolline was fully under the influence of her less human instincts, wand magic was not available to her. She could not cast defensive magics nor was she inclined to try.

She did not die. Instead, a wall of white feathers formed between Apolline and the death curse before it could connect.

"I can do better!" Voldemort yelled before calling on one of his other favored curses. Fiendfyre. "Catch this one little girl!"

A serpent of pure flame uncoiled from his wand and reared up to strike at its summoner's enemies.

Stop! Gabrielle demanded, her wand pointed stiffly at the center of the snake.

It stopped.

"Very good!" Voldemort praised, and in the light of the frozen fire snake, Harry and his Angel saw Voldemort's face twist into something that may have passed for admiration. "But not good enough!"

With a small flick of his wand, he struck. Just as Dumbledore before him, Voldemort came to the conclusion that a little angel with a wand was a troublesome little angel. Rather than let her keep the holly and phoenix feather shaft, he summoned it from her grasp. Again just as before, the wand slipped between her fingers only to stop when the chain around her neck pulled taught. A thin gold chain kept her wand from flying into the Dark Lord's grasp.

His pull was great, too great for her to dig in her heels. But what if... what if she didn't want to? What if her Lord had an idea... one that could win them the fight? Rather than stand her ground, Gabby ran straight towards the manically grinning Dark Lord.

Behind her, a Veela shrieked her displeasure. One of her chicks was running right into a snake's waiting jaws.

Voldemort couldn't help but smile as his hand closed around Little Angel's wand. He was about to chide the little thing for such a foolish move- but that was when Gabrielle struck.

She struck not with her wand but with her halo. Two pure white wings snapped down quickly, and when they dropped they brought the blue-white circlet of magical fire with them. The air shook as angelic power rang in the tone of a massive bell being struck. By the time her halo dissipated across the stone at her feet, Gabrielle was standing right back next to her mother again. She was back, and she brought Voldemort with her... or rather... she brought some of Voldemort back with her. His arms, his wand and the front half of his torso and legs to be specific.

Dark Lord Voldemort's body collapsed lifelessly in two different places at the same time. Ewwwww!

Her Lord was greatly pleased. Ecstatic even.

I win! Gabrielle crowed. I win! I win! I win! I win! I win!

Apolline's anger faded and she returned to human form. Oddly enough, Gabrielle's Lord was not free to move about as he expected to be.

"Oh, very good indeed..." A dark voice hissed into the air.

Shocked, angel, mother and ghost all looked for the 'man' who hissed those words. What they saw was something that Harry had the great misfortune of meeting once before, something that his angel knew of due to their connection and that Apolline knew of through pensieve memories. The shade of Voldemort appeared before them, a dark stain drifting before the mass of frozen Fiendfyre which still lit and warmed the area.

So shocked were they that Gabby lost her angelic form and glared (cutely) at the dark specter from beneath silver-blond hair.

"Why aren't you dead like a good bad guy would be?" A righteous Gabby demanded of the disembodied Tom Riddle.

"You cannot kill me! You cannot even set me back!" He laughed. "I have come closer to immortality than any who lived before me. I can never be defeated. In time, the whole world will bow before me!"

"I'll get you! You'll see!" She may not have been intimidating standing with her brow creased and fists balled but she certainly tried to be.

"No... in fact, I have a better idea. I'll get you." Voldemort purred. "I'll get you and I'll make you my angel."

"No you can't! I won't let you! Harry won't let you!" Gabby raged.

"Won't he?" The dark shade drifted over to address Harry's still frozen form. "Did you think I wouldn't know? Did you think I who have delved into the deepest mysteries and darkest tomes in existence would not understand your connection?"

Gabby was silent. Her mother pulled the girl to her and aimed her wand at the shade.

"Begone!" Apolline shouted. "Your power is broken you honorless bastard."

Voldemort began to drift back towards the lake, but he was not done just yet. He kept his eyes on the frozen form of his first great challenge.

"I know your secret, Harry Potter. Blood magic made that girl your slave... though I am surprised that you knew enough of blood magic to catch yourself such a fine prize... perhaps this is your godfather's influence?"

Voldemort explained himself calmly, far too calmly for one who just died. And he was uncomfortably close to the truth in his deductions. Gabby's anger fell to uncertainty.

"Did you really believe I would not figure it out? Me? The greatest wizard in history? You bound her to you just before you died... and in doing so you gave me the key to absolute power!"

Uncertainty fell to fear, a reaction that was unfortunately mirrored by her Lord. She sniffed.

"I will take your angel from you Harry Potter. She will be my slave, my pet! She will shake the world apart until all who live swear to serve me!" Voldemort yelled triumphantly before flying into the night.

Gabby turned to her mother and cried.

Little Angel and big Veela held each other in the light and heat of a motionless fire snake and the world seemed to explode around them. Aurors approached the bridge to secure the area, treat the wounded and release Harry from his magical binding. Hermione and the others would soon be joining Luna in the Hospital Wing again. Ginny's condition was very serious... or it was until a sobbing angel came to sob on her. A steady rain of angel tears drew bone and muscle back together to fix up her Lord's friend. Neither Little Angel nor Harry would allow their personal troubles to stop them from helping where they could. Speaking of, Gabrielle continued to cry on command for as long as she could manage it. Luna could use healing tears too, couldn't she? And some of the aurors were hurt fighting, right? Angels helped others. That's what they did.

-o\0/o-

After the dust settled, it became clear that the Dark Lord's followers were successfully repelled in a battle that would see many graves dug and funeral pyres lit. Luckily dark wizards had the worse time of it and few escaped alive.

Even with the joy and relief of the masses for whom that night was a major victory, Harry and Gabby were troubled. Yes, dementors were killed. Yes, dark wizards by the dozen were captured or killed in a battle that would break the dark's remaining strength in England. Yes, the corpse and wand of Dark Lord Voldemort could be shown to an elated public as proof of victory. But all of that still wasn't enough for those who knew the truth.

The Dark Lord wasn't really gone. He wasn't even discouraged. Even worse, Voldemort said he knew about the bond. He said he could take Gabby away from Harry. Was he right? Was he lying? How did he find out?

The wizarding world may celebrate through the night in honor of Gabrielle Delacour, the nine year old Angel, Savior and Dark Lord killer, but Harry and Gabby would not be smiling. As soon as the full tale was told, neither would the Delacours nor would Hermione.

Harry and Gabby needed to go back to Angel School. Tomorrow even. If Gabby had to skip school to do it, she would.

End Chapter

Chapter Notes:

I had to point out to my pre-reader that this is not the end of my story. Granted, she was a bit sleepy when she came to that conclusion, but I think that some may see this as a break point before some kind of horcrux hunt. Personally, I do not like horcrux hunt stories (especially the original canon one) and I will not write a horcrux hunt into this story even if I concede the existence of horcruxes as shown in canon. There will be one more internal story arc wherein our beloved good guys seek to smite ol' Voldie once and for all. Clearly my estimate of twenty-five chapters was off a bit (as was my very first estimate of ten chapters). But still, we are past the seventy-five percent mark and possibly past eighty-five percent. It all depends on how the little stuff adds up.

I don't remember reading any other stories where teleport magic was used as a direct attack instead of a support move, not that portkeys or apparation really lend themselves to the idea. At least, not in any HP story I've read. Maybe you could intentionally splinch someone by grabbing them and forcing a bad apparation. There was that scene in the first Stargate movie... and there was always a chance that a Star Trek transporter beam could be used in creative ways... but then I don't tend to read fanfics in those universes.

Chapter Twenty-five: Weigh Anchor

It was getting brighter. The warm feeling of Harry's arms around her was becoming indistinct, his and Gabrielle's words of love were fading as quickly as the light increased.

"Little Em." A voice called to her. "Honey, the healer needs you to wake up now..."

Hermione groaned and rolled away from the light. "Just a few more minutes, Mum."

"Miss Granger, please sit up. It's time to change your dressing and I have a potion for you to take."

That was Madam Pomfrey's voice.

Wait just one minute... wasn't that Mum's voice she heard just a moment ago? Hermione mentally nudged herself to wake up faster before opening her eyes.

"So which one was it? The time dragon or the acid spitting toad?"

Hermione's dad asked that question from the chair next to her bed. Her bed in Hogwarts' hospital wing, she realized after looking around. "Dad?"

"Alain called us last night, dear." Emma said as she stood next to Daniel's chair. "He explained a bit about what happened and how you got hurt. Your healer was nice enough to let us watch over you as you slept."

Hermione started a bit. "Was I that badly injured?"

She gave herself a mental once over. She was sore but not suffering any acute pain; tired but not weak. With any luck, she'd be out of the Hospital Wing after a checkup and a potion or two.

"Thank Merlin you were not, dear." A familiar Scottish brogue added. Hermione quickly turned to make sure she wasn't just hearing things.

"Misses McGonagall!" Hermione somehow found the energy to smile. Her parents were a great comfort but her favorite former

professor was an unexpected surprise. "I didn't expect to see you here!"

"I didn't expect to be here myself until Monsieur Delacour came calling at my floo just before sunup." Minerva seemed to be in good spirits in spite of her early morning. "It seems he managed to learn of some rather exciting goings on here at Hogwarts last night..."

Hermione blushed and looked away. Minerva continued.

"Monsieur Delacour overheard the rather foul rant of an auror captain who complained about how Hogwarts was without a headmaster and lacked anyone with the proper training to take control of the castle wards. Alain asked the captain if an ex-deputy headmistress was likely to have the proper training and the captain supposed that she would. Of course Alain knew of my employment history and he had my floo address... so here I am."

"With all due respect," Hermione's cheer dimmed, "I can no longer refer to that man as a professor. He tried to kill Luna and seemed quite willing to look the other way when dementors were set to attack the muggleborns and halfbloods."

Minerva's mood dropped to match Hermione's. "Were it not for Albus's personal assurances that Severus was trustworthy I would have run the man out of my school long ago. It is to my eternal shame that I followed the Headmaster's lead for so long. How many promising students did that horrid man ruin in his tenure?"

Hermione saw the new Headmistress's eyes dim a little and rushed to change the subject.

"So you're the new Headmistress, then?" Hermione asked.

Minerva nodded in the positive. "It's not official at the Ministry... what there is of a Ministry... but the wards respond to my will well enough. We won't be seeing dementors on school grounds again, I assure you. And while the elves have always been properly respectful, I dare say I've never seen them quite so happy to heed my call. I don't think they liked serving Headm- Snape."

Hermione wisely avoided her first instinct to say that any other school head must be a better employer than Snape. There were

plenty of lighter issues to ask about... if you could call the challenge of running a magical school while it played host to a fair number of refugees in a time of war 'lighter issues'. The paperwork alone looked to be a daunting task, not to mention that it would now be Minerva's responsibility to train up a new deputy in the esoteric art of castle ward management.

Much as she wanted to stay, Minerva was a very busy witch and had to leave after catching up with Hermione for a few more minutes. Not long after, Hermione was given a clean bill of health and released by Madam Pomfrey. This did not mean she was free to go. After her release, an auror lieutenant introduced himself to Hermione and her parents and spent the next two hours asking the girl about last night. It was something that they would be doing with each student as they were made available by Madam Pomfrey. Surprisingly, Ginny was the first up and out. She even managed to get away from the aurors before her Mum could show up and crush the girl in a hug. Molly would have to settle for smothering her boys in the Hospital Wing until Ginny could be found once again.

...

"Hermione." Ginny called from behind, causing the older witch and her parents to stop and turn. "Can I talk to you for a minute?"

Ginny spoke up again. "In private, please?"

Hermione, Dan, Emma and their two French auror escorts shared a look. A short break in their castle tour would be acceptable as long as it was kept fairly short.

The redhead jerked her head over to a random classroom door to the right.

"Let's make this quick if we can, Ginny. I only have two hours to give my parents the full tour before Alain wants us back in the Great Hall. We'll be going back to France with Alain and Luna just after lunch."

"And Harry?" Ginny asked. She didn't see him.

"He went back to France with Gabrielle and Apolline last night. With Gabrielle being uninjured, they were not about to risk her in

Hogwarts any longer than necessary no matter how many aurors were on station."

"Still," Ginny persisted, "I really need to ask you about last night before you leave... I heard something, something I really didn't want to hear."

"Alright then. Mum and Dad haven't seen the inside of a classroom yet anyway. Plenty in there to keep them occupied."

The six entered a classroom and split up in short order. Ironically, it was the young teens stressing to older medical professionals that 'look don't touch' was rather important here. Dan and Emma had already been to the Hospital Wing and didn't need to go back so soon. The aurors stayed near the door.

"Okay." Hermione turned to her friend as soon as her parents were suitably distracted. "What is it?"

Ginny bit her lip for a moment before asking. "Is it true?"

"Is what true, Ginny?" Hermione responded.

"What He Who Must Not Be Named said last night... is it true? About Harry and Gabrielle?"

Hermione thought for a moment. She didn't remember anything of the sort, but then she had taken a nasty bump on the head when Voldemort threw her back down the bridge along with the others. "I don't remember anything like that, Ginny. What do you think you heard him say?"

"I may have been miserable from the pain but my ears worked well enough the whole time." Ginny said a little forcefully. "He claimed Harry used blood magic to make Gabby a slave. It's not true, is it?"

Hermione's stunned silence was telling.

"It is true then..." Ginny said sadly.

"Wait... no, it's not what you think, Gin." Hermione didn't try to completely deny it as she'd already lost her chance to do so believably. "It isn't slavery and their bond isn't dark in any way. Do

you really think Gabby's a dark creature? Did either of them act dark last night? Do you think our Harry would go dark for any reason? Do you really think he would let himself die on purpose to trap a little girl he's never met before?"

Ginny didn't respond but for a small head shake almost too small to see. She didn't want to think Harry and Gabby were dark...

"Look," Damn, damn, damn! Hermione couldn't allow rumors like this to spread. "You can kill someone with a levitation charm but that isn't dark magic. Transfiguration isn't evil though you can do terrible, horrible things to unsuspecting people with it. I admit, there was blood involved when Harry sacrificed himself to save Gabrielle... that part is true enough... but don't for a minute think that he planned some kind of dark ritual. Harry isn't evil, Ginny. Voldemort is wrong."

"For all your book learning I'm surprised you don't know better already... Blood magic, Hermione. Blood magic is dark magic and always has been. Any pureblood knows that." Ginny replied immediately, a lifetime of teachings reacting to Hermione's contrary words.

"Just-" Hermione stopped for a moment.

Ginny was just repeating what she'd been told all her life. The Weasleys may not be religious, but that didn't mean their beliefs were any less firm than someone like Jeanne d'Arc's beliefs were. Hermione quickly came to the conclusion that she couldn't simply argue Ginny out of her beliefs. But. If she could get the girl to hold off... keep quiet for a bit... then maybe she could find a way to enlighten the devout light witch later. Harry and Gabby would surely be able to prove the point given half a chance. Hermione had faith enough in that.

"I understand that you have some issues with what you heard last night... and about what I've just said as well... but please, Ginny, give Harry a chance to explain it himself before you go telling the world what you heard Voldemort say."

Ginny stood motionless for a moment before nodding slowly.

"You haven't already told the aurors any of that, have you?" Hermione asked, afraid of what she might hear.

"No. They stopped their questions at the point when I got hurt and restarted them when I was healed." Ginny answered. "I said I was in a bad way and they didn't even bother asking me for the in-between bits."

Hermione let out a sigh of relief before tensing up again. "What... what about the others?"

Ginny thought for a moment. "I'm not sure, but I think I was the only one fully conscious at the time."

Hermione visibly relaxed again. Ginny narrowed her eyes.

"They deserve to know as well after risking their lives out there. When Harry comes to meet me, I'll have them all with me."

"I-" Hermione stopped short of giving her opinion, especially as it was contrary to Ginny's. She needed to be agreeable, or at the very least she needed to stall. "I'll tell Harry. Please don't say more to anyone until he can meet you again. And please, please consider meeting him one on one first."

Ginny didn't say anything, but she did nod and turn to leave the room. As Ginny left, Hermione's parents came back up to their girl.

"Is something wrong, dear?" Emma asked.

"Nothing I can't handle given time, Mum." Hermione responded. "But enough of that. Next stop on our tour is the library unless you have any questions about this classroom."

Her distraction worked. As it happened, Mum and Dad had several questions about some of the teaching aids.

...

Deep in the dungeons, within his personal quarters in the Slytherin dorms, Draco lay back in his bed and held on to Daphne as she fought off her fears. The two teens were still fully clothed just as they had been when falling asleep late last night... or was it early this morning? Draco slowly stroked Daphne's hair, all the while thinking... and not about the witch in his arms.

Tagging the Weaslette with a listening charm before they all headed off to fight the Dark Lord was turning out to be a stroke of genius on his part. And considering how often Granger met with competent aurors, he was sure he had the right target too. The charm gave him access to anything Ginny herself heard and it still had a few hours left until it unraveled naturally. Not that he cared if it held out any longer... it had already given him far more than he could have hoped for.

Draco considered what he overheard, both last night and just now. As gifted as the Dark Lord was at magic, Draco was still doubtful of his boasting... until Granger all but confirmed it. How delightful, Potter and the mudblood caught up in blood magic. The very idea warmed Draco's heart. Either they were foolishly innocent of the truth, in which case the Wizarding World would set them straight soon enough, or they were far from the paragons of virtue they are made out to be. Either way, Draco had knowledge which could net him a very high reward should he use it correctly.

The Slytherin prince began working through possible scenarios in his mind... Potter deals with the Weaslette honestly... Potter tries to silence her... the frogs bypass Potter and Obliviate the Weaslette... there were so many outcomes and he needed to be able to plan for each and every one. Draco would Obliviate the bitch if he were in Potter's position. Of course, the real question was just how much could he gain from all this without getting Obliviated or killed himself. He'd have to take steps to keep that from happening once he played his hand. And maybe... if he worked it just right... Draco could take ownership of two puppets that not even Dumbledore or Voldemort could control.

But all that was for later. Right now Daphne was in his arms, an emotional wreck, and Draco wasn't about to ignore the opportunity to turn this to his advantage. They'd been playing a game of equals for far too long. It was time for Draco to take the world and bend it to his will. There would be risks, but nothing worthwhile was ever achieved without risk. It was time to seek his proper place in the world. It was time to establish dominance.

The young Lord drew Daphne close and kissed her passionately. She offered no resistance.

-o\0/o-

The next morning saw a concerned specter watching over the ladies of the house as they packed for a trip to the Ukraine.

"Harry."

"Yes, Alain?" Harry replied.

Alain motioned for Harry to follow him out of Gabby's room and the ghost complied. Behind them, Gabby and her mother fussed over an assortment of clothes and other items that the ladies of the house were planning to take to the Veela temple. After a short trek through the house, Alain entered his study. Once Harry was clear of the door, Alain shut it and put up a series of privacy spells.

Harry was getting concerned. "Look Alain... I already said-"

"You're sorry. Yes you did and I forgave you almost as soon as I heard what you had done." Alain waved off Harry's attempt at an apology. "When I heard Gabrielle's words about the two of you being tested before you went to Hogsmeade, I began to understand what it means to have an angel for a daughter."

Forgiven or not, Harry truly looked sorry. As wonderful as the Angel-Lord bond was, there was a cost to the Delacours. Gabby was an innocent child by every measure imaginable and yet Harry had a claim to her heart that not even her parents could match. If that were not hard enough to cope with, higher powers had clearly claimed the both of them to play a game that, important as Alain was among wizards, it left him as a lesser pawn when his daughter and ghost-son were clearly higher ranked pieces... possibly the very highest.

"If- if I could have saved her another way, Sir-"

"Enough, Harry." Alain said with a firm yet gentle voice. "I am proud of our Little Angel and I am proud of you. I begin to think that were I to find myself sent back in time to stand on the shores of Black Lake yet again, I may not even seek to keep Little Angel out of the water. Truly, the two of you are blessed to have the connection you have. You yourself have claimed that your afterlife has been far more enjoyable than your life before it, or am I mistaken?"

Harry blushed silver and looked down. "You are not mistaken, Alain."

"Good." Alain said with an air of finality. They have yet to broach the subject Alain brought Harry into his study to speak of in the first place. "Now, I remember once telling you that the boys in Research were quite disturbed by that diary bound spirit you came up against."

Harry thought for a moment. "Oh, right... I forgot about that."

"Well, Harry, I think it's time we talked about what they found." Alain added gravely.

Harry sat up straighter. Not that there was a chair under him but he did it just the same.

"There is a branch of magic that deals with the soul... though I suppose this should come as no surprise to you considering all the things you have come across..." Harry nodded in agreement. Non-magicals may doubt the existence of souls and ghosts all they want but they are an accepted truth in the magical world. "Wizards have experimented on souls and their connection to this world for as long as we remember. While some of this interest has manifested in research for the sake of research, much of it was less noble in nature."

A serious look flashed over Harry's features. "I don't doubt that. To have the key to your own soul, or worse yet to have the key to someone else's soul sounds like a goal any up and coming Dark Lord would pursue. Though surely there is a corresponding light magic branch to the dark one? Soul healing, perhaps?"

Alain stopped for a moment to consider Harry's words. There was something strange about them... they seemed so reasonable and yet all his experience proved them to be false.

"Not that I'm aware of, son." Alain pushed the conversation back on track. "The point is that Tom Riddle's diary was most likely enchanted with soul magic. We think that Riddle used the diary as well as other items to anchor his soul in the mortal plane."

If Harry had been alive, Alain would have seen him go pale. "A-anchor?"

"That, or perhaps soul containers would be a better term. The accepted name of this kind of object is 'horcrux'." Alain continued. "They work by retaining a bit of the soul of their creator. If a wizard who has created one or more of these horcruxes is fatally stricken, they do not truly die. It is thought that one cannot die unless the whole soul passes into the afterlife, and if you have a bit of your soul in one of these anchors..."

"Then you've got a foot in the door as it were." Harry added.

"And if you keep your foot in the door then you don't have to go through if you don't want to." Alain concluded. "You would then be practically immortal so long as you use the right ritual to come back."

"Like Riddle did." Harry murmured. "And your 'boy's' in Research think Riddle made more than one?"

"You destroyed his diary before it could bring him fully back to life yet he still lingered in this world until his resurrection at the Third Task."

"I got that one with a basilisk fang. Can we do the others the same way?" Harry asked.

"That would work assuming you can get us one of those fangs, but there are other ways too." Alain answered. "The trick is finding the damned things. You were very unlucky to stumble across a horcrux and yet very lucky to also stumble across a way to destroy it so quickly. And we don't know how many there are or where to find them."

Harry was beginning to think of how unlikely it would be for them to find anything that Tom Riddle didn't want them to find when it hit him.

"Bloody hell..." Harry cursed and started turning in tight circles as though he were pacing furiously. "I've had part of this conversation before. I've had this conversation before! Damn it to hell! Dumbledore bloody well knew Voldemort had soul containers. He knew Voldemort was immortal. He knew and he didn't tell anyone! That horrible bastard!"

Harry lashed out at the quills and ink blotter resting on Alain's desk. They all bounced off a nearby bookshelf with a loud crash.

"May I ask how you knew this, Harry?" Alain asked softly. A quiet flick of his wand set quill and blotter right again.

Harry stopped.

"It was after he was already dead and we were crossing the Styx." He called softly. It looked like he was calming down now. "I should have seen his words for the clue they were but I didn't. Dumbledore said that the diary had part of Voldemort's soul in it and that he almost came back because of it. He even used the term 'soul shard'. I completely missed that this was a clue to ol' Tommy's continued existence. I should have told Hermione about it. She would have figured it out, I bet."

"Once you told everyone where you met him last, no one and I mean no one wanted to know the details of that encounter. Besides. Once you label someone 'nutters' as you labeled your former headmaster, we tend to have less interest in what they say."

Harry nodded. "Right. Well, at least I know what Gabriel and I will be talking about today."

"Gabriel?" Alain repeated as if he'd never heard the name before.

"Y- you don't know?" Alain failed to react to Harry's question. "Oh... well I suppose you should have a chat with your wife. I will too. I thought they were telling you what went on in Angel School."

Alain shook his head in the negative. "I think Régine has deemed me unworthy of learning Veela lore."

"How's that going to work when your own daughter knows more Veela lore than Régine does." Harry replied.

"Gabrielle?" Alain asked surprised.

"Well," Harry paused, "I wasn't going to say Gabby but I guess she does now if you stick to the angel side of it. I was thinking more about Fleur and how she's become quite the expert. All that

research and those contacts she made on the trip must count for something, wouldn't you agree?"

Alain nodded. "I agree, but let's not start a Veela family feud if we can avoid it. Apolline's family tree is small enough without having to trim a few more branches off over internal power struggles."

Harry tried to pretend he didn't hear that. Clearly there was still much about Veela that he did not understand. Perhaps it was for the best.

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Gabby watched France slip away only to be replaced by an enchanted island at the eastern limits of Eastern Europe.

"Gabrielle!" Fleur shouted.

Her older sister dropped what she was doing and rushed to hug Little Angel. As they had yet to slip away from their ride in, Hermione and Momma were also pulled into the hug.

"Thank Jeanne you all survived!" Segolene cried, the brunette adding her weight to the group hug.

Little Angel soaked in the love for a moment or two before she remembered why they were coming here so soon. Much as Harry has been there for her, both Angel and Lord have been uncomfortable since last night and unable to think about anything other than Voldemort's claims.

As soon as the hugs let up, Gabby let her transformation slip and became a little silver-blond haired girl again.

"What are the three of you doing here?" Fleur asked as she fussed over her sister.

Momma took a warm travel cloak she had been holding and draped it over Gabby's shoulders just as the cold was beginning to make the little girl shiver.

"Something bad happened last night, Fleur." Harry's voice floated over the group of women. "Gabby and I need to go to the Hall of Angels to get some answers."

The ghost materialized just outside the ring of females, though he had not truly left Gabby. She wasn't the grumpy gremlin of her coming of age but Voldemort's threat really shook the girl. Even then she would have been alright had Harry not reacted the same way she did... but he did react the same way... and now Little Angel was a sad little angel. Hopefully Gabriel and her sister angels would know what to do.

"But you won!" Segolene interrupted. "Of course it was terribly foolish to go to Hogwarts in the middle of a fight- but you won! What you did wasn't bad... it was fantastic!"

"How did you find out about last night?" Apolline asked. "Without magic you could not have heard over the wizarding wireless."

"We did not hear it here on the island..." Fleur replied. "We were with Danya and her sisters last night in the village camp."

Fleur pointed to the far shore of the frozen lake and the new arrivals followed her gesture. There on the far bank, Harry and Apolline stared at a hive of activity. People were moving between the broken brick walls on foot or in the seat of lorries and earth movers. There was scaffolding all around the gate wall. Outside of the old village, there was a long line of tents and equipment stockpiles. And a couple of tanks. Army tanks, not the water ones.

"What in God's name have you been doing, Fleur?" Apolline asked. "Maman will be most displeased."

"That was not my doing. Grand-mère has no one to blame but herself for this." Fleur answered smugly. "She has been bragging too much about how much her family has done to restore Veela heritage and now the other Grand Matrons are beginning to send their own daughters on behalf of 'The Cause'. The Volk sisters have brought Danya's fiancé into the fold for security. One of her sisters is seeing a local politician with influence in public works and construction, so we get free material and labor as well. The official cover story is that we have rediscovered a historically important early Christian church, one that has cultural significance."

"We are not exactly lying either," Segolene added, "and having Marion involved lends us a certain credibility with the local governments as she is properly credentialed for this kind of work."

While Apolline was beyond surprised, neither Harry nor Gabby cared all that much, really. They politely held still and listened just the same. Hermione was too busy drifting around the temple's entry vestibule to hear them, her mind lost to the history on display before her very eyes.

"...but..."

Fleur tried to comfort her mother. "The Grand Matrons are not going to kick us out, Maman. Marion, Segolene and I are still the acknowledged experts and everyone agrees that Gabrielle's right to access the site shall never be contested. Being an Angel has its perks."

"Marion and Segolene?" Apolline asked. "But they-"

"Are not Veela?" Fleur anticipated her mother's problem. "Give Segolene a Veela biology quiz and she's likely to do better than most Veela. After Rome, she easily knows more Veela history than any Grand Matron can claim to know... I alone know more than she and that is because she follows my lead in research. And as for Marion, she may not know much about Veela, but she is an experienced magical archeologist and therefore she is an asset we cannot afford to lose. I have already made that point to Madam Misko and Madam Loren, both of whom visited this week."

Apolline raised her brow. Two Veela Grand Matrons came to review Fleur's work in one week... and they went home happy? And Fleur is still in charge and no one is dead? This is a near miraculous feat for a young Veela with no political connections nor any children of her own.

"Oh, and Madam Misko is sending two of her daughters to aid the Volk girls in the village. They plan on building a meeting hall and faux temple around the enchanted entry wall and putting up a few homes and other necessary buildings in the immediate area. Within a year's time, we may have a new colony guarding the temple gateway."

Gabby may not have followed most of what her sister and momma were saying, but she and Harry both heard that last line. Little Angel and her Lord shared a small smile. Rebuilding the village sounded like a good idea to them.

"Won't all the construction destroy what's left of the old village?" Apolline asked.

"No, Maman." Fleur continued. "Marion's grandfather took all of the non-magical artifacts away a long time ago and the enchanted wall is well protected. There are other plans and ideas, of course, but surely you didn't come with Little Angel in tow to hear about those..." Fleur looked over her shoulder. "... and we better rein in Hermione before she gets too close to the temple guardians."

Inside the entry vestibule, Hermione was drifting towards the guardian statues and their gold plate armor. While shiny things did not normally catch the girl's attention, millennia old shiny things certainly did.

Soon enough, Fleur took Apolline and Hermione aside so she could get the real story of the 'Battle of Hogwarts Castle' as the wireless was calling it. As they caught up with each other Harry and Gabby entered the treasure room and made their way to the back wall. After stopping to say 'hi' to the angel statue, Gabby stared into the halo etched into the back face once more. Just as before, the halo flared to life and established a connection to the nine year old angel standing before it. Angel School was open for business.

Gabriel! Gabby cried and ran straight for the older angel.

She leapt bodily at the older woman and held on tight after making contact. Gabby lost her transformation as the reason why they were here on a school day returned to the forefront of her mind. She began to sniffle. Soon she was crying.

"Be at peace, young angel." Gabriel soothed the girl in her arms. "We will work through this together."

"Listen to her." Lucifer added, her arms coming around Harry to bring him into a comforting embrace. Harry felt the tiny spark that

came with the first skin on skin contact whenever he came here. They knew now. "This is not the end of the world."

Harry's other Gabrielle joined in the hug with Lucifer and Harry.

"I won't let them take you from me!" She cried, her voice thick with emotion. "I won't!"

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Ginny hid herself and watched as the other students passed by completely absorbed in their own little worlds.

She wondered how excited they would be if they knew what she knew. She also wondered... would she be better off if she didn't know? Should she have given in to her injuries and passed out from the pain last night? Would she be happier? Would she be as happy, as care free and relieved as they were? Hiding here in an alcove behind one of Hogwarts' many suits of armor, she wrapped herself in shadow and hid from the happiness of the world.

If she truly wanted silence, she could have hid any number of other places as Hogwarts was far too large for the number of students it housed, but she couldn't really take the silence... not after Tom. Tom took advantage of her early in that first year at school when she hid herself away from all of her classmates and family. She refused to tell anyone about her troubles with Harry or about her talks- her written talks- with Tom. That turned out well, didn't it?

She was hiding again and she hated herself for it. She was scared... but why?

Harry was such a prat- why did he do this to her? Why did he have to dabble in blood magic? Why was Hermione so accepting of it? And the little Angel Gabrielle? How could dark magic be responsible for her existence? Ginny was there when the little girl fought Dumbledore. She saw... well, nearly saw the girl take down a swarm of dementors. She also saw much of Gabrielle's victory over Tom on the bridge, even if she was half-mad with pain and light headed from blood loss at the time. How could Ginny's savior and his pet angel use blood magic to do what they did?

It didn't make sense. It didn't make sense, and Ginny was not going to drop the subject until it did.

"...and that's why I could never have done it! You're so brave, Sue. The hat must have sorted you wrong!" A Puff Ginny didn't recognize jabbered on and on as Puffs tend to do.

"I wasn't brave at all... really. I knew that Harry knew the right thing to do and I followed him. That's the simple truth!" The strawberry blonde witch replied, face red in embarrassment.

"So he's Harry now, is he?" Another witch in the group teased causing all of the other girls in the group to titter except for the embarrassed Miss Bones.

"I was scared out of my mind on that bridge!" She ignored the taunt about Harry. "I can't understand how the Gryffies did it... He Who Must Not Be Named called out Hermione and Ginny by name! If he'd done that with me I'm sure I would have wet myself. Ginny actually cursed him for it!"

One of the girls gasped in surprise. They all stopped and stared at their friend. Ginny's actions must be new to them.

"Tom."

The Hufflepuff witches turned as one to the alcove hidden in shadow. Ginny was done hiding from ghosts be they Slytherin or Gryffindor. She slipped into the light.

"His name isn't He Who Must Not Be Named. It's Tom Riddle." The redhead took a good look at the Puff's before her. Susan was surprised to see her... two of Sue's friends were clearly disturbed... and the last one looked near to wetting herself right there. "Harry saved me from Tom, and I'm not talking about when we were all babies either; he saved me First Year when Tom took me into the Chamber of Secrets. I owe Harry... at the very least I can tell everyone what that monster's real name is."

Before any of the Puffs could respond in any way, a new voice filled the hall. "But do you really owe him?"

Draco. The Slytherin slid up to the girls until he was uncomfortably close to Ginny. She took a step back.

"You fought a Dark Lord, right? You nearly died last night if the rumors are to be believed... and I just don't see how you can owe a ghost a life debt, however noble the sentiment." Draco smiled in a way that most witches found disarming.

Not Ginny. She tensed.

"What's it to you, then?"

"I don't know..." The young wizard drawled. "I just thought there might be more to the story, really. I mean, sure the little French girl is special. She is a creature so rare one would think Lovegood came up with the idea of her... and she is so terribly powerful. One has to wonder how she came by it all."

Draco smiled at the assembled girls for a moment before turning away. "But then what do I know? I'm just a student and the little Veela girl is... is that really what she is? And she's so young... how she could be so powerful while still so young?"

He began to walk away, and still the girls said nothing in response.

"Good day, ladies."

It was only after Draco turned a corner and left their sight that Susan said anything at all. "Well I for one don't know what he's on about. Gabby is the sweetest, purest, most innocent little girl I ever met."

"I suppose..." Ginny answered, "At that age, I was a bit of a terror myself to hear Mum talk, and the only other witch I knew at nine was Luna."

The other girls nodded silently. It wouldn't be fair to compare anyone else to Luna.

As the girls all went their separate ways, the Gryffindor witch resolved not to hide in the shadows any longer. Coming back out of them clearly scared the shite out of anyone near enough to witness it. And she had to really work at the riddle that was Gabrielle Delacour. Nothing made sense and that disturbed her. Hearing her

own fears coming out of Draco Malfoy's mouth was far worse. The boy seemed so damn confident too, like he knew something.

Still, her old feelings for Harry made her want to give him a chance, and she did promise Hermione a meeting, so she would give Harry that chance. She would wait for him to come back to Hogwarts Castle and give his side of the story. Until then, she would wait. And think.

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The stars glittered overhead as Lord, Angel and several sentient magical constructs sought comfort together. Gabby found herself sitting in Gabriel's lap in the center of the large stone at the turn in the creek, her other self having adopted nearly the same pose in Harry's lap not far away. Lucifer sat with her feet dangling above the waters and her attention on the stars above. Eventually, Gabriel spoke.

"There are three problems that must be overcome. First and foremost is the problem that is Tom Riddle." Gabby shifted in the elder angel's lap. Gabriel allowed her to settle before running her fingers through the little girl's hair, a motion that was mirrored by Harry as he held the magical image of his angel. "It is very important that the both of you understand that whatever he may have learned, his knowledge is fundamentally flawed. No matter how much arcane knowledge he acquired, it has failed to teach him the most basic principles behind the Angel-Lord bonding."

"The most basic...?" Harry turned the head of the small girl in his lap. "You mean how the bond is formed?"

Gabriel nodded. "A chain with links of blood forged in love and magic. Tom Riddle may know blood magic. He may be as powerful and skilled as any dark wizard known to the world in the last age. But he cannot know the truth of the Angel-Lord bond and still expect to be able to take Gabrielle from you, Harry."

"Because he doesn't love you like I do..." Harry whispered to the girl in his lap. She smiled and blushed prettily. Harry looked up to Gabriel. "...and he wouldn't know self sacrifice if it bit him on his arse. But can he break the bond?"

"Of that we cannot be certain." The brunette cautioned. "My sisters and I spent days unnumbered in search of those who practiced dark soul magic. We slew all who knew of it or who sought to use the power against us. My true self watched with her own eyes as Michael dispatched the last known master of the art twelve centuries ago... the last master as well as the death cult who followed him. She made the sky fall and the waters churn until their temple and power was but myth and memory. You will never know how I wept for the souls of his victims, souls which were warped and broken and devoured at a whim. Sadly, even with all of our efforts, records of the accursed techniques may have been hidden and preserved."

Lucifer stood up and turned to their guests. "I will show you how to defend against bond breaking soul magics, Harry, but you will have more than just that to deal with."

"What do you mean?" The boy asked.

Gabriel answered him. "The second problem. Tom Riddle is again our focus, and soul magic is involved, but this is more about what he has done to himself than what he intends to do to you and Gabrielle."

"This is about Voldemort's horcruxes, isn't it?" Harry asked. "Alain mentioned those to me. Do you think you can tell me how to find them? How many are there?"

Lucifer and Gabriel both glanced at the stars before turning back to Harry. Gabriel chose to explain. "It is possible to hunt down his anchors one at a time. It would take time and it would be very dangerous. I would recommend having teams of professionals do the real work if you sought to defeat him in this way. I also expect Tom Riddle would realize what you are doing and make attempts to counter it."

Lucifer picked up the conversation. "Fortunately, we do not have to chase them all down. When I... fell... the demon responsible did not attack me directly. His magic sought out my bond, my chain, and assaulted a single link. Loath as I am to suggest it, a similar technique would work against Riddle."

Both Gabby's shivered.

Harry had a thought. "But wouldn't that leave bits of his soul on this side of death? Could they rebuild or something? Don't you need the whole soul to pass through?"

Lucifer shook her head. "I know what Monsieur Delacour told you, Harry, but modern wizards are misled by their incomplete understanding of the subject. A soul anchor is not made of a real soul shard. And while blood may or may not be involved, magic always is. As is always the case in magic, intent governs the lightness or darkness of the anchor; whether it be selfless or selfish, helpful or hurtful. The diary Tom Riddle made was made by taking a life without bloodshed and it was to have been activated by taking another life, again without bloodshed."

Lucifer paused to take a deep breath and got back on track. "I can teach you this magic... enough that you may break the chains between Riddle and his anchors, but it will be Gabrielle's duty to physically cast the spell and break Riddle's connections to the mortal plane."

"What?" Harry tensed at Lucifer's words. The angel in his lap tried to hide deeper in her Harry chair. "You can't do this to her. I can't do this to her!"

Harry could feel fear pouring in through their bond and he was sure his reaction could be felt by his Gabby.

"A ghost cannot cast this spell, Harry." Gabriel added, her own voice thick with the pain of knowing the truth.

They all knew teaching soul rending magic to Little Angel was dangerous in ways that attacking a cloud of dementors could never match. It was the one class of magic that could hurt her terribly in ways that could never be healed. Should the Dark Lord survive their next encounter, he may learn from the attack and turn the horrible spell back on her.

"Can't I show the spell to 'Mione or Fleur?" Harry begged. "I don't want Gabby anywhere near this one!"

"Are you willing to risk teaching this magic to others? Won't the French magical government want to know what magic was used to attack the wizard and not his individual soul anchors? Won't the

International Confederation of Wizards be interested?" Gabriel looked up to the stars before continuing, "I can see a world where blood magic is in balance, used both for good and for ill. The wicked of the world will continue to be wicked and the righteous will continue to be righteous. Soul magics, sadly, are more dangerous by far. The effects are beyond even death's ability to reverse. At least blood magic cannot follow the deceased into the next plane of existence. We fought to stop the use of soul magic by wizard kind in the same way that the common man fights to restrict his own nuclear weapons, for one tragic misstep may spell Hell on Earth to those who survive."

Harry was silent at Gabriel's words. He couldn't answer. He just knew he didn't want his Gabby to do it.

"If the modern world learns the magic I have to teach," Lucifer picked up the conversation, "Then they may yet discover more about how magic affects the soul and that is something we cannot allow."

Harry closed his eyes and fought to calm down. His base instinct was to risk himself and yet he physically couldn't do it himself. He could tell Hermione about the spell... or Fleur... and either witch would swear on her life and magic to do what needed to be done and do it secretly, but there were still risks. Or... he could will Gabby to perform the spell.

He would hate it. She would hate it.

Harry looked over the head of silver-blond hair in his lap, his eyes searching for the eyes of the little girl in Gabriel's lap. Green eyes locked on to the softly glowing blue orbs of his Angel.

She would hate it, but she would do it if that was what he wanted.

Only, he didn't want her to.

Harry and the small group of angels all sat quietly and watched the stars turn above them.

This wasn't going to be easy.

"So what's problem number three?"

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Luna paused in her letter writing to take a bite of lunch.

"Beauxbatons, dear? Are you sure?" Emma asked again.

The two were in the Granger homestead just outside of Marseille. Luna was done with Hogwarts. She wouldn't go back again, not for all the Snorkacks in Sweden.

Luna nodded confidently. "Yes, Mummy Granger."

The girl went back to writing furiously.

"But dear..." her adoptive mother pressed forward, "Much as I would hate to have the Atlantic between us, Salem is an English speaking school. You still can't speak French and Hermione has confirmed that the classes at Beauxbatons are not instructed in any language other than French. Hermione's been studying French since she was little and she still has trouble with some translations."

"I'm working on that, Mummy Granger." Luna added, not looking up from her work. "I've two cauldrons on low simmer in the kitchen and the last ingredient should be available in a few days."

Emma nodded uncertainly. She couldn't argue magical methods with her girls... not even after browsing through Hermione's textbooks each summer. If Luna said she knew a potion that could teach her languages, Emma trusted the girl not to lie about such things.

"Are you owl ordering the last ingredient? Will you need some francs or galleons to pay for it all?"

"No thank you, Mummy Granger. I've got this covered."

Luna finished her missive and closed it with a red wax seal. The brass seal itself was a gift from Dan and Emma upon Luna's adoption and showed a granary under the crescent moon. Just as Luna was ready to blow out the candle she used to melt her wax, a pure white owl flew into an open window near the table.

"Perfect timing, Hedwig." Luna stated.

Hedwig barked.

"Of course, my pretty friend," Luna replied airily, "An owl of your pedigree is never late. It is beneath you."

Hedwig barked again and nipped at Luna's hair. Luna responded by giving Harry's first beloved female avian a bit of bacon. After Hedwig had her fill, Luna picked up her missive and attached it to the owl's leg.

"Straight to Segolene Royal, Heddi-bear, and don't spare the horses!"

With a squawk, Hedwig lifted off the table and winged it out through the window. Luna blushed and giggled a bit.

"Such a dirty beak! I didn't know Hedwig despised horses with such passion." Luna turned to her Mummy Granger, "Did you?"

Emma just shook her head.

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"The third problem," Gabriel intoned, "is the rest of the Wizarding World and the stigma given to blood magic."

"Right."

Harry knew they would have to deal with this at some point. Having a Dark Lord bring it up 'casually' just highlighted how important dealing with this issue would be. Not that Dark Lords were all that reliable as character witnesses, but rumors and research could really take the problem from mole hill to mountain in record time.

"I- ummmm..." Gabby Mark One was about to make a suggestion before she got trigger shy and backed off.

"What is it, Gabby?" Harry asked. "Don't be afraid to speak up, Angel."

While the deceased Lord was not feeling all that confident or happy himself, he could push his love and faith of Gabby to her through the

bond. Gotcha! Harry grinned as he spied a small blush and smile on Gabby Mark One and he could feel Gabby Mark Two fidget in his lap... just like Gabby Mark One was fidgeting now.

"Welllllllllll..." She tried again. "Why- um... why don't we tell the truth?"

Harry didn't know what to say.

"Harry is afraid that the wizards and witches won't like hearing that, Little Angel." Lucifer said. "He is afraid that they will think the two of you did something bad."

"But I'm not bad!" Gabby almost squawked even without her angel form. "I'm a good girl!"

"Of course you are a good girl, Angel." Harry soothed. "The best! But... they may not see it that way if we tell them the truth."

"Harry." Gabriel called softy. "What happened when you tried to trick Jeanne?"

Harry dropped his head. He tried to trick the French Saint and paid the price for being sneaky about it. Gabby had the right of it that time and this was the same thing if only at a much greater scale.

"So... what do we do? Have a press conference and tell everyone that intent really is the important bit?" Harry chuckled even though he was only half joking. "How do we break a fundamental belief held by the whole Wizarding World?"

Gabriel and Lucifer glanced at each other for the briefest of moments. Gabriel lead off.

"This weekend, you and Gabrielle will be very busy here in the Hall of Angels, Lord Potter."

"The name is Harry." Harry replied.

Gabriel ignored him. "You shall learn the magic required to break Tom Riddle's connection to his soul anchors. You shall also learn simple light blood magics which you can use to enlighten the world

of it's true nature. You will deliver a message to the whole of the Wizarding World that all magic is intent based..."

Lucifer continued her sister's sentence, "that to give blood freely, in innocence and to do so selflessly is in no way dark. And one more thing..."

The two angels were getting a bit Weasley Twin on Harry. This was weird. Gabriel continued, "We will teach you a higher blood magic casting. One that directly uses the bond between Angel and Lord."

Lucifer spoke up one more time. "You will learn how to take advantage of the soul anchor that you yourself posses, for that is what the Angel-Lord bond is at its deepest level."

"What... what are you saying?" Harry asked.

Deep inside, Harry knew what he wanted it to mean. Both Gabbys were buzzing in anticipation.

"We will teach you not only how to unchain a soul from its anchors but how to return a soul to it's earthly container as well." Gabriel smiled warmly. "I believe you are ready to learn the blood magic art of resurrection."

Both Gabbys shot out of their lap-seats and began to dance about squee-ing- and then chirping- in joy.

Well, if there was one thing that could get both Gabby and Harry to forget the threat that is Tom Riddle, even if only for a few minutes, it was the thought of returning Harry fully to the land of the living.

Hallelujah.

End Chapter

Chapter Notes:

Thank you all for reading, and if you're going to review, then thank you for that too. As of this posting, my story has over 1360 reviews and tonight it will pass 500,000 hits. Wow. Go team Veela!

If any of you are interested in reading a book that is as close to a genuine Hogwarts classroom text as you are likely to find in the real world, then get a copy of *The Philosophy of Natural Magic*, first written in 1533 by Henry Cornelius Agrippa and translated to English in 1651 by 'J.F.'. On one hand, Agrippa argues that his work is in accordance with the Christian dogma of his time. On the other hand, one could easily see how he or any who wished to make use of his book might find themselves on top of a pile of burning wood surrounded by screaming peasants double-quick. There are sections dealing with Love Potions, Divination and Astral Projection among many, many others. It is thick with sentences that make Shakespeare's plays appear easy to read by comparison and I'm quite sure many of the words contained therein have not been set in type for centuries. It's totally worth getting a copy. Truly outstanding work.

he Little Veela that Could

Chapter Twenty-six: A Crisis of Faith

She was alone. The sky above her was a smooth cloudless blue and the ground below was a frozen expanse of ice and snow that extended clear to the horizon. The snow at her feet reached half way up her shins and a whisper of wind pushed across the ice covered lake before her.

It was beautiful.

Eventually a new sound reached her ears. It was the soft crunch of footsteps that slowly grew louder as someone drew nearer. Perhaps that was a good thing; Hermione could appreciate the beauty of nature but she never quite liked the feeling of uncertainty that came with leaving civilization behind... except, right now she was feeling really, really good for some reason.

"Mione!" Gabby squeaked.

No wonder she felt better. The little French girl was practically glowing with joy; happiness rolled off of Little Angel in waves. Actually, Hermione couldn't remember the last time she saw Gabby this happy without wings and a halo. Maybe she was improving her control?

Hermione smiled and turned around. "How did Angel School go?"

At 'Mione's question, Gabby's joy seemed to double. Her crystal blue eyes sparkled and a bright smile nearly split her face in half. She was so happy that she was near to bursting... and then she did burst. Gabrielle's cloak fell to the ground as a pair of pure white feathery wings stretched gloriously behind her.

"That good?" Hermione asked.

The muggleborn couldn't help but smile brighter in the angel's presence and in response Gabrielle began flapping her wings and prancing about as though she had just won a game. This was a far cry from the sad little angel who brought Hermione to the Veela temple a few hours before.

Actually, Hermione was beginning to feel a bit guilty about earlier. Harry and Gabby were both clearly unsettled – and for good reason – before trip. When Harry confirmed what Ginny said Hermione began to feel their fear as well. Surely a Dark Lord would know everything there was to know about dark blood magics, right? And yet, even with such fears to weigh her down, she immediately lost herself to the beauty of a lost Veela temple. If only the temple art wasn't so rich; if only those guardian statues weren't so fantastically beautiful. At least Gabby's current mood helped lessen the older witch's guilt.

Come on! Harry wants to ask you something! Gabrielle chirped eagerly. She even grabbed the older girl's hand and pulled. Faster!

Hermione soon found herself jogging behind an angel who was practically skipping across the island.

"Mione!" Harry called when the two finally appeared at the head of the temple. Wonderful! He looked to be just as happy as Little Angel herself.

"Yes?" Hermione nearly giggled her response.

"Good news!" Harry shouted. "Very good news indeed... but first I need your help."

Hermione happily nodded for him to continue.

"How would you like to learn an ancient lost magical art? Would you like to help make the world a better place?"

Maybe it was the angelic love that filled the air or the dashing smile of the (dead) boy who had her heart or maybe it was the offer of using magics most rare to change the world. Maybe it was all three. The end result was that Hermione was in her own little world when she replied.

"Ooooooh, you say the nicest things, Harry..." Hermione cooed.

Gabrielle giggled and her giggles fell over Harry and Hermione like the tinkling of little bells. Harry blushed silver before looking away. Hermione managed to shake herself out of her little trance and look down, her own blush burning her cheeks. She briefly considered

pressing some fresh snow onto her face to cool off but settled for just answering the question.

"I'd... I'd love to help you, Harry."

-o\0/o-

Bellatrix opened her eyes. She heard a small noise coming through the floorboards beneath her. Small bits of dirt and grime fell from her dress as the pureblood witch slowly pulled herself off the floor. After spending the last few hours literally laying in wait for her master to return, her hair was matted and dirty but she cared little for such vanities. What was physical beauty compared to magical power? Were not the screams of dying mudbloods far more beautiful than some frilly dress or fashionable charms?

Bellatrix grinned and prepared herself upon hearing a second noise downstairs. This one sounded vaguely like a vase falling near the front of the house. She moved through dim candle light and stood in front of the stone pedestal bearing her Master's next great triumph. She aimed her wand at the closed door and waited.

A third noise sounded- a high pitched squeal as the last house-elf left in her Master's service was caught unawares. This was followed by a low hissing sound that was too soft for Bellatrix to fully understand. Maybe she couldn't understand, but she could place the source of the hiss. She immediately lowered her wand and fell to her knees on the floor.

"Master," Bellatrix whispered just as a dark form passed through the door. "You have come back to me."

"Of course, Bella." The shade answered. "I always do."

"I applied the salve as proscribed, Master." Bella added, standing quickly. The witch turned her eyes to the body lying on the pedestal. Her hand reached out and slid along the dead boy's flank.

"It is in perfect condition. All decay has been removed... no damage remains save the magical scars on his stomach and forehead." Bella seemed giddy. "I could go out and snatch a young wizard or two born under the right sign... you could be made flesh again by sunup!"

Her gaze slowly ran down the length of the body which once held Harry Potter's soul, and as she did her dark master noticed the witch's eyes pause briefly below the waist before moving on. He cared not for such physical distractions but perhaps he could indulge her. In fact, the ritual may even return a desire for physical pleasure... the desire he willingly sacrificed long ago for immortality- but that thought was for another day.

"Patience my sweet," the Dark Lord replied. He moved past her to hover over Potter's corpse. "You speak true, yet I will not sacrifice power for time. Wormtail failed me that night nearly one year ago and I will not allow a repeat of his mistake here. The right blood must come from the right source at the right time. I want the smallest Delacour to kneel before me."

Voldemort's shade turned to observe the one witch more loyal to him than any other. He saw her desire to please him yet he also saw her childish impatience. Perhaps a small gift to sate her.

"The anniversary of Potter's demise approaches. People will want to commemorate the occasion, I'm sure, and what better way to mark his death than to return him to the people who miss him so?"

Bella nodded eagerly. "It will be glorious!"

"Yes, it will be..." Voldemort agreed. "And Bella?"

She drew herself to attention before her Master. "Yes, My Lord?"

"I have a new task for you."

"You honor me, My Lord. I will not fail you."

-o\0/o-

"Are you sure about this, Harry?" Hermione asked over her breakfast.

The boy nodded from the other side of the table. Fleur and Segolene watched from behind their own fruit laden waffles but neither wished to weigh in just yet.

"It's a bit of a gamble-" Harry stopped himself. "To be fair, it's a great big gamble but I can't see to doing this any other way."

"It's not easy to change such deeply rooted beliefs." Hermione returned. "People aren't known for changing their minds so thoroughly... magical or not, it's the same problem. There is a reason so many wars were fought based on religious beliefs after all."

"The population of Hogwarts certainly changed their minds about me often enough but I do see your point. Still, we can't let Voldemort run around unchecked with what he knows and people like Ginny could still muck things up simply because they don't know the truth." Harry answered. "Hiding it all or denying everything and covering it up... well... I would have gone that route except for how poorly it worked with Jeanne. I fouled on that one and Gabby had to come to my rescue. I have the same problem today, we can't stay quiet forever and lying outright is likely to blow up in our faces. I think Gabby knows best here."

Harry turned to his little angel and gave her a little wink. She grinned and winked back.

He continued, "If people won't accept the word of an Angel over the word of a Dark Lord, then we just have to do something he can't upstage, something that will put everyone in a mood to listen to our side of the argument."

"The common man is capable of ignoring great things Harry, and we still have to convince one witch in particular first..." Hermione said as she worked things out in her own mind, "and I expect that a lot of people will still see it as wrong even if we do manage to convince some of them. Things could go very wrong and if it does then we'll need a miracle to deal with the angry mob that forms against us. "

"By the standards of the Wizarding World a miracle exactly what you will be performing, 'Mione." Harry nodded, happy with his plan. "And if a wizarding miracle isn't enough, well, that's what Gabby's for, isn't it?"

Gabrielle nodded vigorously.

"I want to do more angel miracles. They are more fun than using wands." The nine year old added. "Playing tag with those demons was fun but I want to help fix people. Can I fix someone? Pleeaaaaase?"

Gabby began looking between Harry and Fleur with her best puppy dog eyes and pouty lips. Surely one of them would break under the pressure.

"Well..." Harry started. His first instinct was to agree immediately- especially after he felt Gabby's eagerness rushing in over their bond. On the other hand, she wasn't asking to practice wand magic, she was asking to use her angelic powers. This was a lot bigger than a simple charm or transfiguration. "I don't know anyone that needs help like that, Angel. Not someone we can just walk up to and heal without making a big to do of it."

"Perhaps... I may know someone." Fleur got their attention. She had an idea that could make Little Angel happy, give her a chance to practice and repay a debt the Delacour family owed. And if letting Gabby have her fun helped ensure the locals became loyal to the Angel Gabrielle, so much the better.

By the time Big Sissy Fleur explained her idea, everyone was eager to let Gabby have her fun. Breakfast was finished in short order and everyone put on their coats for a little trip. Someone nearby was about to get a little unexpected visitor. Two someones nearby, actually.

-o\0/o-

Knock – knock - knock

"Coming." A soft voice called in Ukrainian.

"May we come in?" Fleur asked. She and Segolene knew a few simple phrases and Marion could hold a basic conversation, but the others visiting from France were still hopeless.

They didn't bring the translator. He was not to be trusted for something like this.

Harry watched from behind Gabby's eyes as the door to the Three Sisters opened. He first saw one of the Volk sisters wiping the bar down in preparation for the day's customers. That Veela was soon joined by her two sisters as well as the officer who helped rescue Segolene. He was spending medical leave with his fiancée Danya. The engaged couple still sported bandages covering more than half of their faces, a testament to the power of dark magic and its terrible effect on innocent lives. Danya and her man would have to get used to the pain and also the horrible scars, scars that would never fully heal no matter how skilled the surgeon or healer was. Unless...

"You wanted something?" The commander asked gruffly, clearly fighting the urge to scratch through his bandages. Magical acid continued to sting like a bitch no matter how often you cleaned out the wound.

He took a long drag from the cigarette in his hand before surveying the group of foreigners who ran the ancient church's construction site. Huh, more Veela. The room had more Veela than he was used to seeing, but he refused to make a fool of himself today. And why was a little girl here? The Three Sisters didn't cater to children.

After a few false starts, Fleur and Marion used their limited linguistic skills to thank the commander for his part in Segolene's rescue and to thank the Volk sisters for all of their help. They said that they had a gift for the happy couple. Just what the gift was... well that was still hard to explain.

Gabrielle stepped forward, drawing everyone's attention. At the back of the group, Segolene looked around for strangers for a moment before closing the door and locking it. It wouldn't do to have just anyone watching.

Gabby was done waiting. She wanted to help the people who helped her sister and she wanted to do it now. With Harry's unspoken support, Gabby shrugged off her coat and changed. Love and peace filled the Three Sisters as Gabrielle spread her wings. By the time Gabrielle's halo flared above her shiny silver-blond hair, the gruff man's cigarette had fallen to the floor. His mouth was open in shock.

Gabrielle approached the soldier and his fiancée. She cooed softly and held her hands out to them. Both fell to their knees unbidden. Little Angel approached Danya first. She hugged the older Veela

with her arms and then with her wings as well. As her feather covered cheek rubbed up against the Veela's bandages, Gabrielle thought about all the pain Danya would feel from this injury. She tried to imagine what it would be like to be so badly hurt. Tears began to fall.

Inside his angel, Harry's spirit glowed with satisfaction. This was brilliant... helping people... it made everything worthwhile. He wanted to make the world a better place and Gabrielle agreed with him one hundred percent. There was nothing stopping the two of them from helping Danya and her husband-to-be, and with a little luck, patience and maybe a miracle or two Harry and Gabrielle would be able to help many, many more people.

By the time Apolline lead her flock away from the Three Sisters, Gabby and Harry were both extremely pleased with themselves. It worked. Gabby got to heal two people. Surprisingly, the two people she healed were far happier about the whole 'hugged by an angel' bit than the 'getting healed' bit. Danya's sisters got angel hugs too... and then so did everyone else.

This gave Gabby an idea. She wanted to go find all the people that thought she was a bad girl and she would angel-hug them. She would hug them all and then she'd dare them to say she was bad again. Who could say she was bad after an angel-hug? Nobody, that's who. Gabby would ask Harry if he liked her idea later. Definitely later; Momma and Big Sissy Fleur and the others were plotting again.

That evening, the prettiest cleverest owl to ever carry mail swooped into their camp and delivered a message from home. Hedwig showing up wasn't exactly a surprise, but Hedwig showing up with a message for Segolene was a bit unexpected, her reply even more-so.

-o\0/o-

"Bark!"

"Heddi-bear!" Luna squealed.

The young blonde set down her waffle laden fork and moved to give Hedwig a hug and a kiss. As she did so, her adoptive mother spied

a letter and a vial of red liquid tied to the beautiful messenger owl's leg.

"Luna dear, what's Hedwig brought us this morning?"

Luna moved back enough to spot the delivery and relieve Hedwig of her burden. Luna smiled happily at the site of the vial and quickly read through the letter.

"Excellent!"

"What is it dear?" Emma prodded again. "Is that the last ingredient you were talking about? The one you need for your language potion?"

"Yes, Mummy Granger, that's exactly what Hedwig brought me!" Luna quickly snapped up the vial and the letter and made to get up. "May I be excused, Mummy Granger?"

"Of course, dear."

Emma slowly rose from her seat and followed Luna into the kitchen. Behind them, Hedwig began to savage what was left of Luna's breakfast. Neither woman minded overmuch.

Luna quickly set about her task. She re-lit the stove and removed a stasis charm which had been keeping one cauldron from going bad due to overheating. Soon both cauldrons were where she needed them to be.

"Here we go..." Luna uncorked the vial from Segolene and poured several drops from it into one of the cauldrons.

Emma watched silently as Luna mixed the two liquids at seemingly random intervals. In fact, were it not for the way Luna began singing about clockwise this and anti-clockwise that, Emma would surely have thought Luna made it all up. In no time at all, Luna was pulling both potions off the flame and ladling one into the other. There was a bit more random-ish mixing before Luna drew up a large ladle full of bubbling, frothy pink liquid and turned to Emma.

"Are you sure your French is good enough, Mummy Granger?" Luna asked with wide eager eyes.

"Quite sure." Emma returned.

There was something familiar about the color and consistency of the red liquid in Luna's new ingredient. Emma knew she wasn't magical and she knew that she knew very little about the magical world, but that looked an awful lot like blood to her. She's certainly seen enough blood to know when she sees more.

Even if identifying the final ingredient was giving Emma second thoughts about this whole endeavor, it certainly wasn't stopping Luna. The dirty blonde brought the ladle to her lips, tilted her head back and quickly drank the full ladle of frothy pink potion. Luna then lowered the ladle and stood there, her head still tilted back from drinking the potion.

Emma began to get concerned. "Luna dear-"

"Brrraaaaap!" Luna belched out before laughing at what the potion had made her do.

"Luna?"

"Yes Mother Granger?" Luna replied. In French.

Then her eyes shot wide open.

"Success! It worked! It worked!" Luna hopped in place and shook her hips. "I'm going to Beauxbatons with Hermione!" She then began to dance the Happy Dance right there in the middle of the kitchen.

"Well I, for one, am very happy for you dear." Emma congratulated the girl.

"It's just such a pity that Fleur has already graduated..." Luna sighed.

"Oh, really?" Emma replied. "And why is that?"

"Don't be silly Mother Granger," Luna called back, cheeks reddening, "it's because I- because I..."

Luna suddenly brought her hand up to cover her mouth to cover a gasp. Emma watched with increasing alarm as her young charge

quickly inspected her potion, the leftovers from the second cauldron and then the written instructions sitting on the kitchen counter.

"Five drops. Five... I did add five drops, didn't I? Maybe a wrackspurt- but I didn't feel any passing through... but I suppose my brain is a bit fuzzy now, isn't it?" Luna muttered to herself.

"What's wrong, Luna dear?" Emma put one hand on Luna's shoulder and the other on her forehead to check the girl's temperature. "Should I call the healer?"

"No! I mean- please don't worry about it, Mummy Granger." Luna answered, slightly panicked.

"But if you did something wrong-"

"Please don't, Mummy, please." Luna begged. "It's not all that bad."

Emma put on her best 'you better explain' face and stared down her adoptive daughter. Luna's best sad puppy face did no good.

"The potion worked as advertised as you can plainly see..." Luna began, "but I got more of Segolene than I wanted."

Emma stared harder.

"Segolene's blood, you see... I added it into the memory enhancing side of the potion." Luna looked over to the vial Hedwig brought in. "It was the final ingredient and it affected me a bit more than I planned for. I might have slipped on one of the steps... but I'm not sure."

"And this means what for you?"

"Well... I'll likely act a bit more like Segolene I suppose. A bit more social... maybe a bit more fashion obsessed, I expect... a bit more in love with Fleur than before..."

That got Emma's attention. "A bit more in what?"

Luna sighed and looked back at the stove. "a- a bit more in love with Fleur."

Emma put a hand to her temple. Headache pills were sounding pretty good right about now. Brandy sounded better.

"Right then. No more unsupervised potions from now on. You'll just have to wait until you're back in school again."

"Yes Mummy Granger." The penitent witch nodded her head obediently and began to clean up the kitchen.

Luna cleaned up her kitchen mess and then spent the next half hour writing a letter. She hated to do this to Hedwig but the others should probably know what happened to her if they plan on using blood magic for anything else. And she knew very well that they do plan on it.

"Now where did I put Daddy's wrackspurt siphons?"

-o\0/o-

4 Privet Drive, Little Whinging, Surrey.

Vernon Dursley was quite happy of late. After years of bad luck due to a certain freakish influence in his life, he was finally seeing the kind of upward mobility he always knew he deserved. Vice President Vernon Dursley had a nice ring to it. True it did take an act of God, a fatal heart attack to be precise, in order to free up some space on the corporate ladder but who was Vernon to complain?

He'd already set Petunia on the task of finding a home that was more befitting someone of his station. Somewhere grand. Somewhere more befitting a Vice President. Someplace that didn't remind him of the Freak.

The cupboard under the stairs never did lose its freakishness, not even after the little shit bought it.

"What's for dinner, my pet?" Vernon called out to his dear wife as he moved from his very comfortable position in the living room to the kitchen door. The smell was beginning to draw him in.

"I've a roast in the oven." Petunia said as she moved about. "It'll be out in a minute. Go on and sit yourself down at the table... I'll get you a Newcastle."

"Right, pet." Vernon smiled to himself and began to dream of all of the import brews that would soon be his. Why, with the increase in salary, he expected he could take up touring breweries as a new hobby to go along with his new upscale golfing opportunities.

There was a sharp knocking at the door. Vernon frowned and turned to answer.

The heavyset man made great effort not to look at the door to the cupboard under the stairs as he passed it. That was all in the past. Soon they'd move out of this plebeian neighborhood freeing themselves of that freak's freakishness forever and all would be right with the world.

-click- squeak

"What the hell do you want?" Vernon half shouted at what he found on his doorstep.

A woman stood before him. What drew his ire so quickly was the look of her. Wild, dirty dark hair... crazed eyes, pale complexion and emaciated frame... tattered black dress... it's truly a shame what drugs will do to a person these days. Vernon could tell that this poor wretch must have been quite the pretty little bird once upon a time, the exact same thing happened to one of the better looking Grunnings secretaries last summer. What a waste of life she turned out to be.

"Were you not expecting me? Not weaddy for wittle Bella is we?" The woman let her yellow teeth show in a savage smile. "Such a pity..."

The woman in question then moved to wipe some crocodile tears out of her eyes with her left hand... her right hand hiding suspiciously behind her back.

"Who's at the door, Vernon?" Petunia called from the kitchen.

Vernon turned to answer.

"Just a drug addled gypsy, my pet," he called, "I'll just turn her around and send her on her way..."

"Is that so?" The woman in question singsonged from his stoop. He turned back around to put her in her place.

Vernon only had a split second to register that the woman's right hand was now visible- as was the glowing freak stick in her hand- before she shouted in rage.

"Crucio!"

The pain Vernon felt was indescribable. It filled his mind so completely that he failed to register when his wife came running out of the kitchen or when she shouted obscenities at the freak who had attacked him or when she fell screaming to the same freak attack that got him in the first place. He didn't register any of that, just the unholy pain, until darkness took him.

...

Vernon woke with a gasp.

"Bloody dreams," he grumbled, "must have had too much to drink last night."

The man got out of bed and spent a few minutes moving about putting on some respectable clothes before finally succumbing to the temptation of the smells of breakfast. He waddled down the stair and turned to the kitchen. The stair may have been extra creaky this morning, but he was in a mood for breakfast and he was quite used to ignoring such abnormality.

"Is that bacon I smell, Pet?" Of course it was, though Vernon's nose told him that the bacon was about to be burned unless it was pulled off the stove in short order.

Oddly, there was no reply from the kitchen. Vernon still couldn't spot anyone else in the house. It was odd... like it was his house but at the same time it wasn't. It didn't feel... normal... alive... to him.

Vernon moved towards the kitchen to investigate. "Petunia?"

"She isn't here, Uncle." The reply came from behind him and it didn't come from Petunia.

It came from him. The freak.

Vernon spun around in in rapidly building rage. "What the bloody blue blazes are you doing here, boy!"

"Oh... nothing much. Thinking about the halcyon days when my dear Aunt Petunia and Uncle Vernon would lovingly share their home with me and my dear cousin Dudders would give free sweets and homework advice to his very best mate Harry Potter, of course."

The smooth, mocking words drifted through the air seemingly at random. Vernon couldn't quite tell where they came from, but he had a suspicion.

One of the locks on the door to the cupboard under the stairs rattled just a tiny bit.

"Boy..." Vernon growled, "You're not supposed to be here... You're dead! And when we move I'll not be whispering our forwarding address to your bloody gravestone!"

"You- you don't love me?" The words were soft and full of pain. Vernon hadn't heard the boy sound so hurt since the little orphan was four or five. "But-"

"But nothing, freak!" Vernon thundered. "I never loved you never could love you never will love you! You deserve what you got! Murdered and drowned in a damn lake... why, we had a bloody party the day we heard you left us forever!"

There was a sniffing sound. It wasn't loud, but then it did accompany another little rattling of the cupboard door. Vernon only sneered, back straight and head held high. Then the retching noises began.

"Boy!" Vernon roared.

The noises of sickness only increased and once again the cupboard door shook.

"I'm telling you now, boy..." Vernon snarled, face purple in rage, "I'm about to open that door. And if I see a speck out of place... if it isn't anything other than spotlessly clean..."

The enraged man advanced on the door before he even finished his threat, not that there was more than one outcome possible in his mind. He knew very well that they had never once cleaned out the cupboard under the stairs, not since it became the freak's bedroom all those years ago. Of course it wasn't going to be spotlessly clean.

Pudgy fingers fumbled over the various locks and chains- he slipped more than once in his rage- until finally he yanked the door open so hard it nearly came off its hinges.

Inky darkness greeted him.

"Boy?" Vernon half asked half commanded.

"I'm here, sir." This time, his orphan nephew's voice very clearly came from behind.

Vernon spun around, arms flailing to hit something.

Harry was there this time. The black haired green eyed boy lunged at his uncle and delivered a double palmed strike that sent his uncle staggering back into the open cupboard door. Vernon managed to grab the door frame just as he was about to tumble in and managed to right himself.

"I spent ten years in that dark smelly hole, uncle," Harry's growl set his uncle on edge, "let's see how you like it."

Harry lunged once more, and Uncle Vernon's best efforts were not able to keep him from being thrown back. The overweight narrow minded bigot lost his grip and fell into the darkness of the cupboard. The door immediately slammed shut, each and every lock and chain sealing the door closed without Harry's assistance.

The door shook mightily as a meaty hand struck it from the other side. Vernon was trapped.

"Boy!" Vernon thundered from the other side. "Boy! You let me out right this instant!"

Soon the door was under constant physical and verbal assault from the darkened recess of the cupboard under the stairs. Vernon was still feeling the rage. It would take a while for desperation and fear to set in.

Not that Harry cared particularly. Uncle Vernon wasn't getting out anytime soon. In fact, he'd never, ever get out. Ever. Harry let out a deep sigh before shaking his head and moving to the front door of the house. He never actually wished for his relatives to die and no one deserved to die as Vernon did, at the hands of Bellatrix Lestrange. He never wished for his uncle to suffer like he himself had suffered for ten long years... well, okay, so he had wished for his uncle to suffer like that on more than one occasion... but never in his life did he expect to see the punishment meted out in person.

Harry paused and turned just as his hand reached the doorknob. "I'd love to stay and chat Uncle, but I have things to do and people to see."

Harry's departure was marked by the heavy thumps and muffled screams of an angry bigot trapped in the cupboard under the stairs.

-o\0/o-

"Potter."

"Malfoy."

The two looked at each other silently for a moment. Harry was surprised to see the Slytherin prince appear before him. Harry was supposed to be on his way to a secret-ish meeting with Ginny and the others. Okay, so he wasn't being terribly discreet. He'd been arranging this meeting for the past few days and knew that rumors could start over any little bit of overheard conversation. Honestly he was thankful not to be stuck at the front of the Great Hall with a full student body watching on. Explaining things to ten close friends would be hard enough- eleven if you include Myrtle- but talking to hundreds of easily spooked 'peers' would be a nightmare.

Still, he hadn't planned on Malfoy.

"Rumor has it you've got yourself in a bit of a bind with the little Weaslette." Malfoy drawled as he accidentally on purpose blocked Harry's way.

"I am here to have a chat with Ginny. Bit of therapy for the whole 'I saw Gabby kill Voldemort' thing." Harry hoped he could throw off his former foe. He may sort of owe the ex-prat a favor but the upcoming talk could be a real powder-keg and the fewer ambitious and cunning participants the better.

"Really? That's nice of you. Of course everyone knows you can be counted on to help a friend in need, can't you Potter?"

Harry didn't quite like the way this was going but he couldn't pin down why. "I suppose so..."

"But then..." Malfoy took a step closer, "I overheard that there's more to it than that. I heard that you have a dirty little secret about why little Gabrielle survived the Second Task."

Harry's brow furrowed. "What do you want?"

"It's not what I want, Potter." Draco explained. "It's what I can do for you. I think you could use some guidance and for once it's on an issue Granger can't possibly know anything about. School libraries and public bookstores don't carry books on blood magic. That's something only old pureblood families really know about. Families like mine, Harry."

Harry had heard something like this from Draco before. When he was eleven riding the Hogwarts Express for the very first time.

"You'd be surprised, Draco." Harry returned.

Malfoy's eyes dimmed just a touch but he still looked as confident as ever. "Pureblood lines aren't just about blood supremacy, Potter. The ancient and noble houses are so closely linked because of business. Traditionally business deals were sealed with a betrothal... after all, you can't trust a stranger but you can trust family."

Draco almost smirked when he saw Harry's eyes widen a bit at that argument. Apparently the Boy-Who-Died didn't realize that there

was more than magic keeping the old families together. There was a collective greed. Gold held them together as much as blood did, and if gold were linked to blood then that was even better as far as the purebloods were concerned.

"Think about it, Harry. Ginevra could fall in line like the good little Boy Who Lived fan she grew up as or she could ruin everything for you... and she's just one witch. There are thousands of wizards and witches out there that won't be so forgiving of their personal hero as she is. You're playing with magic that only dark houses like the Blacks, Lestranges and Notts have really been known for in the past few centuries. You need help if you want to stay out of trouble. I can help you."

'But at what cost?' Harry thought to himself. Was Draco the same annoying prat that he was when Harry was alive? Clearly not. Was he still a cunning snake? Clearly he was.

"I'll remember your offer, Draco. Now if you don't mind..." Harry shifted a bit to the side.

The young Lord of two old houses knew it was time to back off. Give the victim a chance to get in even more trouble and then Draco's 'help' would be even more valuable.

After an exchange of head nods, Harry crossed the last fifty meters to his goal.

When Harry finally did pass through the door to Myrtle's bathroom, he was glad he didn't have a stomach for fear of it churning and spilling his lunch. He spotted Ginny immediately and she looked to be about as nervous as he was. Then there were the others; Ron, Fred and George talking amongst themselves about some prank or other. Neville watched on as Cedric explained a spell that the younger wizard had yet to study. Susan, Cho and the Patil sisters were all in a tight circle, and if Harry had to guess he'd say they were making comments about Cedric while his back was turned. If the giggles were anything to go by, then those comments were of the appreciative romantic kind.

Thank Jeanne. Maybe Cho was finally willing to bury the hatchet somewhere other than Cedric's back.

"Welcome back, Harry." Myrtle purred as she floated out of a closed stall. "Always a pleasure to see you, of course."

"Thanks, Myrtle." Harry greeted his fellow specter.

All the living teens stopped what they were doing and greeted Harry in turn. Harry returned each greeting and also ensured a very worried Susan that Luna was doing much better, thanks for asking.

"Soooo..." Harry began smoothly.

"So you were going to tell us about Gabrielle." Ginny prompted.

"But what about Little Angel?" Cedric asked quickly. "She's not suffering from fighting off all those dementors, is she?"

"No, Ced," Harry answered, "Gabby wasn't hurt in that dust up at all."

Ron scowled at his sister. "See? She's fine. Gabby's cute and all but I don't see why we all had to sneak down here after dinner just to talk about Harry's little munchkin friend."

"This is bigger than bumps and bruises, Ron." Ginny snapped. "Harry promised to explain what I heard and saw that night. He promised to explain it to everyone."

"It's very simple Ickle Gin-Gin..."

"...You Know Who gave us all a bump on the noggin and when we woke up..."

"...we learned that Ickle Gabby gave him a good spanking for us." The twins explained the events of the bridge battle in their own particular way.

"I saw more." Ginny insisted hotly. She then looked over to the ghost that once owned- honestly still does own her heart and she delivered her ultimatum. "Tell them or I will."

"Alright." Harry soothed. He looked around the room. "Does anyone else already know what Ginny's hinting at?"

Neville fidgeted.

"Nev?"

"Well, I kind of do remember some yelling back and forth and... sort of... maybe seeing a dark shade taunting you in front of a big fiery snake..." The nervous Gryffindor was mumbling by the end of it.

Harry smiled. "That's right, Nev. That all happened. It would seem that Ginny was the only one unfortunate enough to be completely awake through the whole thing though."

Remembering exactly what happened to her and what kind of pain she was likely in made more than one of the others flinch. Harry soldiered on.

"The point is that Voldemort made some accusations about me and Gabby and he wasn't exactly wrong about them." Harry looked Ginny firmly in the eye. "He wasn't exactly right either, and that's what I'm here to explain."

"But what's so important about the rantings of a Dark Lord that Harry has to defend himself and Gabby," Ron interrupted, glaring at his sister for being such a bitch to Harry, "when he just finished saving us and the rest of the Wizarding World along with us? For the hundredth time?"

"He used blood magic!" Gin yelled back. "She's bound to him by blood magic... now you tell me that isn't dark! Just try!"

Ron seemed offended that his sister of all people would make any such claim. Parvati was itching for a bowl of popcorn.

"I did use blood magic." That got them to shut up. "It was purely accidental, but Hermione figures I kind of stumbled into casting a protective ward scheme sealed with my blood and sacrifice at the Second Task. Now that I'm back as a ghost floating around, both Gabby and I can feel the effects."

"You're a ghost, Harry. You can't feel anything." Myrtle supplied.

"Gabby and I are bound together." Harry added. "I assure you it's not a bad thing."

"It's unnatural!"

"Like talking to snakes?" Harry added. "I still can, you know."

"Can you really?" Padma asked. Trust a Ravenclaw to pick at the small bits of knowledge hidden in the avalanche of emotion.

Harry looked at the pretty dark skinned witch. He and Ron really had done the Patil sisters a horrible disservice by ignoring the girls at the Yule Ball. Maybe he could make it up to her and get one up on Ginny at the same time.

Harry drifted over to one of the sinks that the girls had been standing next to.

Myrtle's eyes widened. Ginny's face lost all color.

~Open~

All of those still alive hissed in surprise as the sink fell away and the door to the legendary Chamber of Secrets opened for all to see.

"Bloody hell, mate. I've seen you do that before and it still gives me the chills." Ron said.

"I can open Salazar Slytherin's personal secret magic door. Does that make me dark?"

One of the Weasley twins slipped up to the gaping hole and pitched a knut into the darkness. It took three seconds for the knut to hit something and make a noise.

Cho had to ask, "How did you get down there?"

Harry and Ron looked at each other before responding at the same time, "We jumped."

"Gryffindors." The Head Girl muttered weakly.

"Are we going to say hi to Gwendolyn again, Harry?" Myrtle asked.

"Gwendolyn?" Parvati asked. There was no Gwendolyn in the castle as far as the gossip queen was concerned.

"Named the snake Gwendolyn." Harry answered. "Maybe later, but the point is that wizards can't always tell when something is dark or light if my experience is anything to go by. Blood magic is like talking to snakes; you can do bad things with it but you can do good things too. I shouldn't be surprised nobody understands, not with professor Binns making a mockery of something as important as history itself."

"You don't learn right from wrong in History of Magic." Gin countered. She got a couple of nods too. Harry's dig on wizarding culture hurt a little.

"Fair enough. You learn from family... from role models too, right?" More nods. "We'll ignore the whole Boy Who Lived thing in favor of well known role models that were not parsel-tongues. How 'bout my Mum. She was a famous light witch, yeah?" More nods. "She used blood magic to save my life and defeat Voldemort."

That declaration earned several shouts of surprise.

"Maybe if I ask Hermione nicely enough, she'll let me make copies of the pertinent bits of Mum's journal from right before her death wherein she writes in excruciating detail about the spell theory of how to beat the dark tosser and then lays out the arithmancy to back it all up."

The Ravenclaws in the room looked extremely eager to get at his mother's notes. Of course, Hermione was the same way. That journal is still 'Mione's favorite possession; she reads bits of it almost every night before bed like clockwork.

Harry noticed that the energy of the room had changed even if it was still tense.

"Want proof that blood magic is- or rather can be light?" He asked.

Ginny wanted to believe him. Oh how she did, but it was so hard. She'd been burned by dark magic pretending to be harmless before after all. "I'm afraid to ask what you could possibly show us to prove dark magic isn't dark."

"You mean bloo-"

"I mean dark!" Ginny cut Ron off.

"Neville." Harry called.

"Yeah, Harry?" The shy Gryffindor answered.

"I used to think you were an orphan like me what with your Gran taking you everywhere, but that's not true, is it?"

"No. My parents are alive, just really hurt." Neville began to stare at the floor.

"I hear that there hasn't been any improvement in all this time. Healers can't do anything for them?"

"Harry!" Susan shouted. There was no need to open personal wounds publicly.

"What if they could be healed, Nev? By blood magic? Would you do it?"

Neville looked up from his study of the floor. "Could we really?"

Harry nodded quickly. "I'll need some help, but yeah, sure we can. Blood magic is strong magic, Nev. I'll give you back your parents, promise. I'd swear it on my life if I weren't already dead."

Neville stood in silence for a moment before taking a deep cleansing breath. With everyone in the room paying rapt attention, he answered, "I want to do it."

"Would your Gran want this?" Ginny asked.

"Gran would trade me for Dad in a heartbeat if she could. If this doesn't work and I'm hurt then she'll consider it no great loss and you can say 'I told you so' all you like." Neville retorted before turning back to the ghost. "So what do I need to do?"

Harry turned to Ginny, who was putting up a surprising amount of resistance by his way of thinking.

"If I can get the Longbottoms all healed up and out of St. Mungos? Will that satisfy you? Will you admit that blood magic doesn't have to be dark?"

Harry could see the fire burning behind her eyes. He had come to expect that. The moisture filling her eyes was a big surprise.

"What is it, Gin. What's wrong?"

The red faced redhead blinked and released two massive tears, one from each side. The tears didn't stop coming either.

"Why do you keep hurting me, Harry?" She asked, barely in control of her own voice.

Harry blinked rapidly while trying to understand the question. He wasn't the only person in the room that had this problem.

"What- what do you mean? I'd never hurt you." Harry returned. "How am I hurting you?"

"You're not what you were meant to be... my life isn't what it was supposed to be!" Ginny cried.

Harry looked over at her brothers. They shrugged. The other girls in the room were trying to figure it out silently. Mount Ginevra blew her top, thus allowing everyone to listen as she explained it all in a torrent of emotion that she just couldn't hold in any longer.

"I grew up to stories of the Boy Who Lived. We all did. When I was little I played games about you and drew pictures of you and I dreamed of the day we'd get married and I'd be Misses Harry Potter-" Ginny saw something that rubbed her wrong in the crowd. "Don't you look at me that way Susan Bones! I know for a fact that you and Hannah Abbott used to play the Marry Harry Potter game just like Luna and I did!"

Harry was even more speechless now than when Ginny started her rant. The distraught witch continued.

"And then I actually got to Hogwarts and we were in Gryffindor together and everything but no it wasn't all fun and games then was it? I had to go and write in that- that- bloody Tom and his fucking

sweet words... but then you saved me, didn't you Harry? And all the pain I'd been through seemed almost worth it for that... but then you died, didn't you? You left me. That hurt, Harry. And then... and then you come back but you run off to France with Hermione and you left me again. And it hurt again. I had all these dreams in my head. They're gone... they're all gone."

Ginny's voice had fallen but the room was dead silent so every quivering note could be heard.

"Now you tell me I don't know light from dark, Harry. What do I have left? I've nothing left..."

Ginny seemed to collapse into herself in her misery. That ended when a cold pressure caressed her cheek. She looked up through her tears to see that Harry had closed the distance between the two of them. He was using what skill and power he did have as a ghost to gently touch her in support.

"I never left. I'm still here... and I don't plan on saying goodbye for a good long while." Harry tried to wipe a tear off her cheek. It didn't work, but she did smile in appreciation of the attempt. "Tom hurt you. He hurt you bad and I'm sorry I didn't figure it out a lot sooner. And trust me, dying was no picnic either- but you've got to take a look at what you still have, because Ginny, you still have a lot."

"I don't know, Harry... you seem a lot happier these days." Ginny came back softly.

"You can't think like that! My life was pretty horrid until I found out about magic. I would have given anything to have brothers like yours and parents like yours and a sister like you... and you never appreciate having a pulse until it's not there anymore... and your Mum's cooking Sweet Jeanne what I wouldn't give for some more of her treacle tart."

"Everything changed, Harry."

"Everything always changes. You get used to it."

"Will I?"

Harry looked into Ginny's vulnerable eyes as she returned his gaze in full measure.

"You will. I'll help of course. You just need to have a little faith in me."

No noise came out, but Ginny did mouth out 'okay' while nodding her head.

More than one of their spectators had to deal with a little dust-in-the-eye problem but once that was over they were finally able to discuss some of the details of getting Neville out of the castle and into London. Gran might give them trouble but hopefully if they moved fast enough she wouldn't be able to throw a spanner in the works.

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A humming blue-white mote of light formed two meters above the floor in the middle of a hospital lobby. This light quickly grew into a ring and then rolled down to the floor after cutting a spherical shape out of thin air. Of course, the air wasn't quite so thin when the ring finally made it to the floor.

Gabrielle, Hermione and Neville had made it to St. Mungo's Hospital for Magical Maladies and Injuries.

"Hmmm," Hermione opined, "Not all that different from any of the older non-magical hospital reception areas I've been to."

There were crystal orbs illuminating the room but they didn't look all that different from some of the more old fashioned electrical fixtures once you got past the floating about unsupported bit. There was a front desk, a floor guide and a fair number of seats full of men and women with various afflictions.

The afflictions themselves, however, did set this hospital apart.

One middle aged wizard appeared to be choking on his own tongue, a tongue which had also become prehensile. There was a witch with a witch growing out of her back. Hermione tried not to stare at the wizard who's bottom was on fire. At least he seemed to be free of pain even if his pants had -ahem- burnt clean off.

A witch in lime-green robes was asking the fire-bottomed wizard whether or not he could count past ten, if he knew the difference between clockwise and anti-clockwise and how firm was his dedication to the truth. Hermione thought this a fair indication that a) the witch in lime-green was a healer and b) the injury in question was likely due to a potions mishap, possibly due to poorly brewed veritaserum. If it was as she suspected then the wizard was likely to find himself on the Third floor (Potion and Plant Poisoning) in the very near future.

It took a moment for Hermione to realize that no-one was staring at them. The injured were distracted by their own afflictions, the healers were distracted by those who were genuinely injured and the helpwitch clearly didn't care about anything other than her copy of Witch Weekly. It would seem that an angel halo-teleporting into the reception room was not noteworthy as compared to witches with witches growing out of their backs.

"Don't bother with her." Neville murmured to Hermione. "I know exactly where to go. Been here countless times before."

Nev lead the brown haired witch and their young angel companion to an elevator near a large pair of double-doors leading to the First floor wards. Gabrielle released her angelic form as they walked, becoming a more ordinary if still hyper-cute little girl. In no time flat, the trio traversed the room, took the elevator up and were walking through the fourth floor towards the far end of a corridor. Neville turned towards a single door.

Hermione's eyes quickly scanned the decorative signage above the door. "Janus Thickey Ward. This is the long term care ward?"

Neville nodded sharply.

Hermione went to open the door only to find that it would not budge. "Locked."

Neville deflated somewhat. He was rather hoping to avoid asking about for assistance. Someone official might get the bright idea to ask them why they were here today. He didn't notice Hermione digging a hand into the small handbag at her side until she spoke again.

"Alohomora." Hermione intoned wand in hand, much to Neville's surprise.

"What about the under-age restrictions? Won't you get in trouble?" He asked even as the door creaked open.

Hermione turned to face the young wizard. "The Improper Use of Magic Office has been temporarily shut down so that their staff and equipment can be used to track Unforgivable spells for the ICW. Read about it in the Prophet a few days ago."

Neville brushed aside his confusion and held the door open for Hermione and Gabrielle as a proper gentleman would.

"Well, hello there!" A disturbingly familiar voice called out eagerly. "I expect you'd like my autograph, would you?"

Hermione froze, blink-blinked and then turned to the source of the voice. Neville sighed before turning to face the wizard as well.

"Hi! I'm Gabby, who are you?" The little silver-blond tressed girl chirped.

"Very, very pleased to meet you, young lady!" The blond fop chirped, teeth glistening in joy. "My name is Gilderoy Lockhart."

"Is it?" Gabby asked, "I've heard about you!"

"Have you really?" Gilderoy answered. "Could you tell me about me? Please?"

There was a look of desperate hope on his face.

"I'd be willing to trade you a stack of autographs..." The older wizard offered. "Mind you, I'm still working on my joined-up letters so my autograph isn't as pretty as it should be- but I'm improving by leaps and bounds these days! Gladys Gudgeon says so in every letter she writes me... though why she continues to write me I haven't the foggiest notion..."

Their ex-professor spun about on one heel and shot off to a table next to a bed by the first window. Clearly this ward had become the man's home after Hogwarts.

Hermione and Neville looked each other in the eye. Neville spoke up. "I know he was pants as a professor, but he's completely harmless now. The Healers have his wand anyway."

Hermione quickly scanned the rest of the ward. There wasn't a lime-green robe in sight.

"Gabby? Will you chat up Professor Lockhart while we go deal with Neville's parents?"

"Are you sure that's a good idea?" Neville asked. "I don't think we should leave her here all alone..."

"Harry thinks seeing Professor Lockhart like this is the most brilliant thing ever! And I'm not alone." Gabby said with finality.

"Little Angel is right," Hermione added, "she's not alone."

The lone wizard looked between his two female companions but didn't feel confident enough to push back... not when they had offered hope for the future if only he did as they asked for an hour or so.

"Fine."

Neville lead Hermione to some curtained off beds at the far end of the ward, and as he did so Gabrielle cheerfully stayed with the former defense professor and looked at his autographs and helped him practice writing joined-up letters. Little Gabby got to play teacher while the grown-up played the eager student! What fun!

With Gilderoy distracted, Neville and Hermione managed to reach their objective. The last two beds in the Janus Thickey Ward. Alice and Frank Longbottom. Neville pulled back one of the curtains with great care and waived Hermione through.

Hermione thought she did very well in stifling her gasp; the two people she found in their own little sectioned off home looked much worse than she expected. Gilderoy looked quite well... but then he had only been in the hospital a short while considering. Alice and Frank, on the other hand, had been residents of this ward ever since Nineteen eighty-one.

Both Alice and Frank appeared worn, weak and weathered far beyond their years. Alice's hair had gone white and fell in unkempt strands. Both her and her husband's faces were thin and worn. And that wasn't the worst part.

Their eyes. They were vacant. That isn't to say that the Longbottoms were bedridden vegetables; they seemed to drift about with the motions of life though there was no spark of intelligence. No reason for their actions. Frank stared out the window by his bed, just watching the world outside. Alice was still in bed, eyes open, and she was blowing bubbles with her bubblegum.

"We should try your mother first." Hermione suggested. "She's lying down and that will help a lot."

Neville nodded mutely. Hermione sat on one side of Alice's bed and silently motioned for Neville to sit on the opposite side. He did. The brown haired teen then began to pull a few necessary items from her handbag. There was a small yet detailed drawing of the runic component, a description the necessary cantrips and a surgical scalpel.

"A- are you quite sure that thing is necessary?" Neville asked eyeing the scalpel warily.

"I wasn't sure that an athame would be allowed into the hospital... a non-magical tool is much more likely to make it past any security wards."

"Looks like it's going to hurt..."

"Yes well, this scalpel is much sharper and better sterilized than any athame I've run across to date. I expect that will be the lesser of two evils... and I can heal you up after the spell is done."

Hermione chose not to waste anymore time. She sat her papers down next to Alice's head on the pillow and silently reviewed the necessary steps. She picked up her wand and clearly enunciated a spell that had been taught to her by Harry one painstaking syllable at a time. The language she spoke in was dead; she was the first living soul to utter these words since Rome worshiped a full pantheon.

At the other end of the ward, Gilderoy and Gabby were having a marvelous time.

"Oh my! Extraordinary!" Gilderoy crowed. "Thank you my sweet sweet little dove!"

Gabby swelled in pride, her face red in embarrassment from the praise. Or perhaps her face was red from the ghost dying of laughter inside her. This was simply too much fun...

"I hadn't even thought of adding extra swirls and twists to the G and the L..." The man tilted his head this way and that while examining his new, improved autograph from every possible angle. "You, my dear, are a true artist!"

Gabby snorted, unable to hold it in any longer. She then began giggling in such a merry tinkly way that Lockhart couldn't help but join in the merriment.

"Who opened this door?" Someone asked from behind the two. "Oh, Mister Lockhart! I had no idea you were expecting visitors!"

Oh dear. This witch wore the distinctive lime-green robes of a Healer.

"I had no idea either!" The wizard laughed out.

The Healer, a kind looking older witch, took a closer look at the surprise guest.

"And where might your Mummy and Daddy be dear? Surely you didn't come alone?"

Now Gabby would be the first to admit that she slipped a bit. She clearly looked down the ward towards the Longbottoms before turning back to deliver her little white lie.

The Healer noticed. She frowned.

If Gabby truly were alone, she would have panicked and fallen into tears begging the Healer not to go down to the curtained off bit of the ward. Luckily, she was not alone. Harry knew something had to

be done and he sent his desire to turn the Healer around over the bond to Gabby in full measure.

"Wait!" Gabby shouted.

The Healer turned back. She was clearly not amused.

Well, it worked on the telly didn't it? And her Angel School training was pretty much the same thing... Gabby straightened her back (not that it did much to her height) and looked the Healer directly in the eyes.

"These are not the droids you are looking for." Gabby's eyes flashed. She pointed one dainty finger at the door out. "Please move along."

The Healer stared down Gabby for ten full seconds before speaking again.

"I've some droids to chase down Young Miss, but after I've got them I expect to see you at your parent's side. Do you understand me?"

"Yes, mam. It's dangerous for a little girl to go off on her own." Gabby responded dutifully.

"I shall make it my highest priority to safeguard this precious child's life, madam!" Gilderoy intoned pompously. "I'll defend her from all manner of harm be it man or beast."

"Why thank you Gilderoy!" The Healer chirped at Lockhart. If anything she treated him as more of a child than she did Gabby. "You be a good wizard and keep her company."

Gilderoy smiled, flashed his sparkling white teeth and nodded confidently. The Healer bought it. Gabby exhaled softly as the older witch passed through the exit door.

"What are droids anyway?" Gilderoy asked the little girl standing before him.

"They're robots in space."

"And what are robots?"

"They're machines that are programmed to work for people."

"Ahhhhhh..."

...

"What are machines?"

Twenty meters down the ward, Neville was trying not to flinch as Hermione cut a rune into his open palm.

"What does this one mean again?" He asked through clenched teeth.

Hermione remained silent for another twenty seconds, just long enough to finish the rune.

"'Family' on you. 'Rebirth' on your mother." Hermione set down the scalpel and picked up her wand. "Do you still remember what to do? It is absolutely vital that no mistake is made."

"I wait for your next cantrip to finish then I place my cut on hers and we repeat the last bit together. Right?"

Hermione nodded. Then she pointed her wand at Alice Longbottom's freshly cut palm and began chanting. She stopped after about twelve or so 'words' and did the same thing for his cut. Then she motioned to Neville. He moved the cut on his palm to cover the cut on his mother's hand before gently pressing the wounds together.

"Ah, Healer Hulbert seems to be coming back a bit early..." Gilderoy mentioned to Gabby as he checked his reflection from the ward's entry door.

"Oh?" Gabby asked, eyes coming up from her stack of autographs.

"Oh dear," the wizard muttered, "she doesn't look at all pleased. And she hasn't got any droids with her either."

"Uh-oh."

Gabby took a step back from her 'work'. Neville and Hermione weren't done with Neville's parents and they absolutely could not stop early. Getting caught would also be very bad.

Inside Gabby, Harry was furiously working through the problem. What would Hermione do? What could a ghost and a little girl do to cause a distraction in a room full of sick people?

"Hey! You know what?" Gabby squeaked.

"No! What?" Gilderoy did so love these little games. He planned on asking his new best friend if she would be willing to visit him more often.

"I'm an angel!"

"Really?"

"Uh-huh!"

"How extraordinary!" He replied. "What's an angel?"

"I'll show you."

On the opposite side of the ward, two teens were finishing the last cantrip in a rather important spell. Hermione held her wand in place for another few seconds before slowly lowering it. Her eyes never left Neville's mother's face. The woman in question continued to stare blankly at the ceiling while chewing her gum.

"It didn't work, did it?" Neville asked in a defeated tone.

Hermione didn't know what to say. Absolutely nothing seemed to be different from before. How was she supposed to know if the blood magic did anything at all? How could she tell what went wrong? After trying and failing to cast blood magic, how could she show her face again in Hogwarts? In Beauxbatons?

Alice popped her gum.

"Cherry. I hate cherry."

"What?"

"Actually, I hate gum of any kind. Do you think I could get some sugar quills?"

"Mum?"

Alice turned her head to look at Neville. "I'm sorry but my son Neville is much smaller than you... though you do have some of Frank's features... are you related to the Longbottoms, dear?"

"Mum!"

Neville jumped onto his mother's bed and drew the poor confused woman into a tight hug. Why, the deliriously happy young wizard was so lost to the moment that he didn't even register the curtains being pulled apart behind them. Hermione noticed though.

The teenaged witch jumped in surprise from being found out.

"Why Miss Granger!" The wizard shouted.

"Professor Lockhart!" She replied in a panic.

"I'm sooooo..." The man stopped short and pulled his hand up to cover his mouth.

Hermione stood frozen, unable to move in Lockhart's tear stained gaze.

"I'm so terribly sorry, Miss Granger... I'm a fraud... a charlatan. I shall have to give myself to the aurors at the earliest opportunity." The ex-professor began to quickly pace back and forth in a tight pattern. "How many people have I ruined? How many?"

"I'm sorry Professor?"

Hermione tried to grasp the situation and found that she could not. Lockhart took a closer look at her face and decided an explanation was in order.

"That wonderful perfect little girl set me straight. Oh, and she restored my memory as well... still not sure if that should be

considered a blessing or a curse. My life's work belongs in the fiction aisle... or as evidence for the prosecution."

"Gabby?"

"Yes, that's the girl."

Hermione looked past the curtains into the rest of the ward.

"Gabby!" Hermione shrieked. The girl was nowhere to be seen.

"Oh, don't worry about her." Gilderoy soothed. "She said that you needed more time and that she was going to provide a distraction."

"A what?"

"Are you and Mister Longbottom ready to depart?"

"Well, no..."

"Well whatever it is that the two of you are doing, you best be about it."

"Yes professor."

"I am not worthy of that title, Miss Granger. You may call me Mister Lockhart or Gilderoy if you are feeling particularly lenient. I know I haven't earned any kindness from you or your classmates."

Gilderoy seemed very penitent now. Hermione felt that this was a good sign for the future.

"Perhaps, Gilderoy, if you were to close those curtains and see that we are not disturbed then you might be able to earn back some of that kindness."

"Ah..." Suddenly a bit of the old fop crept back into the wizard's smile. "Young love... so sweet... I shall be delighted to keep the Healers away while you and your young man present yourselves to the future in-laws!"

"The what?" Hermione squeaked.

"Aren't you here to get their blessing?"

The brown haired girl stood there, eyes wide and mouth hanging open, once again made speechless by her ex-professor.

"I'll just..." Lockhart stepped out and closed the curtains with a wink and a nod.

"Neville sweetie, who's the lovely lass behind you?" Alice Longbottom asked from behind Hermione. "Is there anything special you need to tell your father and me, hmmm?"

It would take half an hour for the pair to recover enough to restart the blood magic ritual on Frank Longbottom. While the two young magicals did worry about being interrupted, they needn't have bothered. The Angel Gabrielle cut a wide swath of utter rejuvenation through the weak and afflicted of St. Mungo's. None were spared. If you were ill when Gabrielle found you, she tried to heal you. More often than not, she succeeded. Even if she didn't, the angel-hugs were a big hit.

Hermione and Gabrielle would eventually make it back to France later that afternoon though Neville would spend the night with his parents rather than return to Hogwarts. News of what the three had done would rock the world for weeks afterwards. Well, mostly it was what Gabby had done that would rock the world, at least until Harry was ready to release the truth about why they were there. Most people would only know about the French Angel who single handedly healed hundreds of British witches and wizards for no apparent reason other than because she could.

The war on blood magic prejudice wasn't near over, but it had begun.

End Chapter

Chapter Twenty-seven: False Dawn

Three young ladies were making art. The first one, a nymph with brown eyes and curly brown locks, was slowly covering her sheet of paper with a dense forest. The second one, a pixie-ish blonde with soft blue eyes, had scissors in hand as she cut paper into tiles for a mosaic that currently only existed in her imagination. The third, a little angel with silver-blond hair and glowing blue eyes, was coloring angels. It was her new favorite kind of art.

"So," Aimee, the brown haired nymph started, "grounded..."

"Uh huh." Gabby answered, never taking her eyes off her angels.

"I can't believe your mom is finally punishing you for something. I'm usually the one that get's grounded and you two always come to my house when it happens, not the other way around." Gigi added, absently brushing a few strands of hair out of her eyes.

"I've never been grounded before." Gabby responded. "It's not so bad..."

"You will find that being grounded gets old fast, but then I've always liked your room. I wish I could be grounded in your room instead of mine." Gigi muttered. The forest now had a unicorn trotting through it.

"But why are you grounded?" Aimee asked.

Gabby put down her metallic silver pen and looked at her friend. "Momma and Poppa don't want me going out to play with Harry's friends if I don't ask permission."

"And you didn't take your mom with you either." Snip snip.

"That too." The next halo was gold.

"Well... at least your mom let us come over today. My parents wouldn't be so soft on me. I can't go anywhere without Maman and Papa anyway. I don't know where anything is outside of my own house and school." Aimee began to push her shapes around like puzzle pieces. First there was a fish... then the paper became a coiled snake.

"Maybe I can take you somewhere next time. I could take us all to school in the mornings... if Momma would let me." Gabby sighed heavily before chewing on the end of her pen.

She missed both of her friends looking at her with hope. Going to school via angel sounded like great fun.

"I can't fix people and give angel-hugs if I have to stay here or in school all the time." Gabby pouted. Sadly, no one important was watching. "It's not so bad though. You two are here with me and so is Harry."

"Where?" Two girls turned this way and that but no sign of the British specter could be found.

Gabby pointed to her head... to the kiss shaped mark in particular.. and replied. "Here."

The other two looked at Gabby's mark.

"Like in class that one time?"

"Yes. Like that."

"Huh..." "Is he going to come out and play with us?" The other two replied at the same time.

Gabby concentrated for a minute.

"I don't think so... He's afraid I'll make him wear a big hat again." Gabby answered.

Three girls smiled at each other and giggled. Big hats were fun. Especially on ghosts.

Harry didn't pop out to say 'hi' until lunch was served. Upon sight of him, the girls immediately retrieved Gabby's biggest hat and made him wear it as they ate. Angel cake was, of course, on the menu.

As the girls ate, Apolline and her mother had their own things to say about grounded little angels a few rooms away..

"The Vatican has requested another meeting, Maman." Apolline said over her fruit plate. "I don't know what to do about it. I'm afraid of what they will ask of my Gabrielle this time."

Régine pulled her napkin from her lap and clasped her hands together in thought.

"And then there is all the others..." The Veela grand matron added unhelpfully.

Apolline tensed. She knew exactly what her mother was alluding to.

"I thank God every day that Alain's boss and the other department heads like having the world's only angel here at home and in not some nameless research lab where white coated men poke her and scan her all day long. Luckily the Minister likes having her in public where everyone can see her. For once, politics works in our favor." Apolline took up her glass of wine and downed the balance in short order. "To national pride!"

Régine picked up her glass and drained it as well.

"Alian mentioned that our own ministry's research department made one request... just one... which Alain quickly beat down and they have remained quiet ever since." Apolline muttered.

Régine nodded towards her daughter. "I know I wasn't very supportive of your marriage at first. I knew your in-laws would be upset- and they were- but that man has become the best father Fleur and Gabrielle could have hoped for."

Apolline blushed a bit at her mother's praise. "Thank you Maman."

"It's such a pity your mother-in-law will most likely outlive the both of us, the intolerant hag. Perhaps a house will fall on her." Why yes, Régine did have a sense of humor and it centered mostly on old movies.

"One can hope. At least she is willing to pretend we do not exist as she and her younger son wait for Alain to die so they can kick us out." Apolline refilled their glasses.

"It's such a pity not all problems are so easy to ignore..."

"Harry says he has things under control, Maman."

Régine's eyes narrowed. Apolline noticed, and her last feelings of pride fell to the wayside as she prepared to argue with her mother. Régine moved first.

"That ghost is the very reason your daughter is under house arrest. Your husband has enough trouble fending off requests from foreign governments for him to have to rebuff all the citizens those governments represent. The Veela race is now under a microscope and that is someplace we cannot remain- it isn't just our family!"

Mother and daughter focused on each other. The real conversation was beginning. Régine continued.

"Veela the world over are getting attention on a scale we haven't seen in centuries. They want to know why Gabby the Veela is now an angel. They want to know how she was made and if we can make another one like her. If we are very lucky then their questions will slowly taper off as we ignore them and act like nothing is happening. This is the only way, dear, we cannot stir up the hornet's nest. If we do we will not survive another purge like the last one. If there is anything we can do to keep people from asking questions we should do it even if it means quietly dealing with Potter's mouthy friends."

"We won't need to-"

"How can you risk our continued existence on one dead boy and a handful of noisy troublemakers?"

The Veela grand matron stood and began to pace. Apolline stayed in her seat but visually tracked her mother's movements.

Apolline spoke up. "Gabrielle would be dead if not for him, Maman. Fleur and I would be soulless husks if not for him. Gabrielle is quite insistent that Harry has the full backing of every angel in the Hall of Angels."

Régine was not impressed. She did not trust any memory that could move on it's own. "A ghost supported by magic we do not understand. We are lucky most people still don't understand what

that stunt at the hospital really means. Why, if Fleur hadn't told us what Hermione was doing with the Longbottoms then I still wouldn't know they were using blood magic. Healers the world over are begging my grand-daughter to pay them a visit and no one understands why she was at St. Mungo's in the first place."

"Please remember, Maman. Harry is doing what he thinks is best for Gabrielle and for Veela. Those who seek my daughter's aid will just have to understand that even an angel cannot do everything they ask of her. Certainly not one who is still a small child herself. And there is still a dark lord out there plotting against my baby. It is he who threatens us. It is he who gave Harry a reason to take the blood magic bull by the horns. Voldemort is why Harry and Hermione and my baby did what they did. And as for Little Angel going out unescorted... Harry has already apologized for doing this without me. He promised to keep me and Alain informed and involved from now on."

"I can still have a priest come to the house and exorcise Potter from Gabrielle..." Régine offered hopefully.

Apolline shook her head ruefully. "He is not some demon to be expelled through prayers, Maman. Little Angel would be most upset if you tried."

Régine huffed in derision. "You were a nightmare at her age and yet I coped. I have put down several challenges for my place as a grand matron and I am still in power. Gabrielle is a mewling kitten in comparison."

"You are too close to my mewling kitten to see the danger, Maman." Apolline countered. "You spend your time with the other grand matrons and you do not see what my girls have accomplished. With Fleur's help, Little Angel is winning over our sisters the world over just as she has won over the wizarding population of Europe. If that kitten meows loud enough then every Veela in Europe will come looking to kill whoever upset their new patron goddess."

"Nonsense. The other grand matrons-"

"The other grand matrons are not priestesses no matter how much they act the part. Don't you see? Gabrielle is an angel. Veela worshiped angels once and we will do so once again- many of them

already are, Maman. Once the temple complex is complete Veela will begin flocking to their new Mecca. They will not come flocking to see grand matrons. They will come for Gabrielle."

Régine's eyes narrowed and her nostrils flared. She gripped the table before her until her knuckles were white. Fingernails slowly transformed into claws and dug into polished mahogany. Her instincts were singing, calling out to put this ignorant child in her place.

"Do you challenge the Council? Do you challenge me, your grand matron, your own mother? Do you?" She hissed.

Yes Apolline was angry, but she and her mother were fighting two separate battles. One of them, Apolline knew she could not win. She visibly deflated.

"This isn't about us, Maman. This is about Gabrielle and Harry."

"Then I shall go up to her room and see to her and the little dead bastard myself."

The older Veela turned to put the younger generation in its place.

"Of course, Maman- but first..."

Régine stopped and turned once more to her daughter. Apolline didn't look like she had just lost an argument. In fact, there was a bit of a smirk pulling at the edge of her lips. Régine didn't know what to make of it.

"Before you put her in her place, can you at least ask her for one of her special hugs? Your granddaughter does love you after all and I am sure that if you tell her you love her then she will listen better to what you have to say."

Régine saw no problem with her daughter's request and agreed. She went up to Little Angel's room fully intent on laying down the law... after a bit of cuddle time.

When she came back down two hours later, Little Angel still hadn't had the law laid down before her. Instead, Madam Mitterrand learned first hand that while putting a little girl in her place was easy,

putting a little angel in her place was impossible. Once Gabby had her arms and wings wrapped around her grand-mère, Régine resisted for all of five seconds before buckling to the power of Gabrielle's loving embrace.

-o\0/o-

The Garden was a lot of things. It was a beautiful historical building in the heart of the City of Light. It was one of those rare places where magic and electricity could be seen working side by side. It was a whorehouse stocked exclusively with Veela. What made the Garden famous was that last bit. To those who had access to the magical world, the Garden was a playground of Earthly delights. To those who didn't such as non-magicals who were rich enough, famous enough or connected enough one could still play as long as certain magical details were hidden.

Ignoring the sinful business conducted within the Garden, the building was also unique for being the largest concentration of Veela inside of a large city in all of Western Europe. It was a place for Veela to work and to play, a place that they could act naturally amongst sisters without fear of attracting the wrong kind of attention. And since the wrong kind of attention was really unavoidable in the long run, heavy powerful wards covered the building and saw to the safety of its residents. Of course, the very nature of the Garden's occupants ensured that these wards would be tested and tested often. Ever since Nathalie's predecessor set up shop, the wrong sort have made attempts to breach the wards on average twice a year and not once has a single girl been taken in any of those attempts. This level of safety was the reason Sirius' memorial was held there, after all.

It was also why certain Veela related businesses were conducted within the heavily enchanted building. The Veela Grand Matron's Council had a whole suite of rooms in which to gossip, politic and plot. A whole floor was open to Veela who were on the run from abusive beaus or abusive governments. Another whole floor was open to Veela who were in need of rehab which, unfortunately, Veela were in need of quite often. Sure, Nathalie and her girls were raking it in but then she and the Grand Matrons easily spend all that money as quickly as it was made in the name of bettering the Veela condition. The Garden was effectively a Veela embassy even if whorehouses don't necessarily have the best of public images. Of

course, that didn't stop all manner important dignitaries from visiting the Garden to study the Veela issue. In intimate detail. Upstairs.

"Ah, you're here." Nathalie greeted her guests as they passed through gilded doors and into her office.

There were cheek kisses all around, seats were offered and coffee was served. After a few pleasantries were exchanged the Veela madam got down to business.

"You two are beginning to have organization troubles, yes?"

Fleur and Segolene looked at each other. Segolene nodded. Fleur took the lead.

"The new construction is becoming difficult to control. It's easier for the Volk sisters to deal with locals but then we have almost no say in what gets done... not that I'm an expert in architecture or engineering."

"Then date an architect and an engineer." Nathalie replied easily. "Add an accountant and a banker too- but just the executives, dear. Don't bother with middle management or anyone who isn't well known in their particular field."

Fleur looked down without answering. Segolene smiled and covered Fleur's hand with hers.

"Or you learn from someone who has faced the same problems you have..." Nathalie knew it would come to this of course. "I've been running this place long enough to pick up a trick or two."

That's the opening the girls have been hoping for.

"We could certainly use some help." Segolene spoke up. "The Volks can cover the construction work and Marion has enough help for her side of things. A lot more of these newly arriving Veela speak English rather than French. Fleur and I are mostly just managing everyone else. We're not doing the dirty work anymore."

"You miss the dirty work, do you?" Nathalie teased. "I have a client with certain needs I could send your way... he's dirty enough to make even me blush."

"I wouldn't want Fleur to get jealous." Segolene added with a blown kiss to her beloved.

"As I was saying..." Nathalie began again. "Unless you want to lose your position as top bitch- or should I say top bitches- running the temple, you need more business and management skills. You need to be able to handle other people and do so under strain."

The girls nodded. Nathalie smiled.

"So work for me."

"What?" Fleur asked in surprise.

Segolene was far more excited. "Absolutely!"

Fleur's head whipped around. "Segolene!"

"What?" The perky brunette shot back. "She's not asking us to be whores."

Segolene looked over to Nathalie. "You're not asking us to be whores, are you?"

Nathalie laughed as she shook her head no. "I need help running things. I need help keeping the paperwork moving and help mixing with the clients outside of the bedroom. I need interns for lack of a better word. Although I should say that I will soon be needing help. It's only a matter of time."

Nathalie fell back into her leather chair and began tracing circles on her lower abdomen with one highly polished fingernail. She looked up at Fleur.

"In one or two months, I will not be able to hide my pregnancy. I hope by then to have someone else able to wine and dine my clients for me. Someone who can keep a building full of catty Veela in line. Someone I trust as I trust family." At that point, Nathalie looked straight at Segolene. "Perhaps two people working together if the chemistry is right."

Both teens were silent. They came to ask for advice or even assistance but had no idea that the tables could be turned on them.

"Think about it. You two aren't spending all of your time in Ukraine anymore and neither of you have accepted any other full time positions... have you? Applied to any colleges?"

"No." "No."

Nathalie continued her sales pitch. "You both need more experience... experience I can give you. You help me run the Garden while I experience motherhood and I'll teach you how to run the temple without letting any grand matrons mark your territory as their own."

Fleur's eyes widened. "But won't the grand matrons just take over anyway? I've spoken to four of them one at a time but I've never had to deal with more than one at the same time."

Nathalie smirked. "Madam Ewing has already made Madame Loren back down from a bid to dethrone you already."

"Ewing?" Segolene asked.

"From Texas." Nathalie returned. "Her line has been dominating American cheerleading competitions and beauty pageants for decades. Your work hasn't taken you to the Americas yet, has it? We can fix that."

"Just wonderful. I'm likely to get replaced sooner rather than later!" Fleur moaned. Having pretty much run things from the beginning, she was loath to step aside now. Having this all revolve around her little sister was a powerful motivator.

"But my dear court flower..." Nathalie purred, "you have a secret weapon no fireball can defeat."

Fleur was too afraid to go with her first guess. Nathalie continued.

"Gabby is the ultimate trump card, Fleur. No Veela will cross her- she means too much to us."

"And the way to Little Angel is through her family. Us." Segolene concluded. No one challenged her use of 'us'.

Nathalie smiled in appreciation. "Great Aunt Mitterrand has power and many connections but she is set in her ways- and she's not getting any younger either. She and her circle of peers are focused on maintaining the status quo. They spend so much time reliving the past that they neglect the future. Your mother is smart enough for the work and I think she may have a good idea of what the future may bring but she is truly dedicated to your father... not a bad thing considering his position in the Ministry."

"Whereas Segolene and I have more invested in the temple, we have the energy and drive and we have a vision you approve of?" Fleur asked.

"Few Veela have your pedigree, Fleur. You've a better education than nine out of ten Veela, you're a damn Triwizard Champion... the winner depending on who you ask... and I just like you." Nathalie added.

"Careful how much you stroke her ego, Nathalie," Segolene whined. "She'll probably expect me to wear the collar and chain tonight..."

Fleur couldn't help but blush.

Nathalie spoke up again. "If it means you two will keep the Garden running smoothly for me I'll do all sorts of dirty things to her ego."

"Only nine out of ten?" Segolene challenged.

"You two don't have college degrees. Believe it or not there are a few Veela out there with Doctorates. Business degrees couldn't hurt you two now that I think of it. Just don't go to a party school and major in vodka."

"And we'll have time for two projects? The Garden and the temple?" Fleur asked.

"I have high expectations for the both of you. Besides, all of the time killing shit work is done by my accountants and lawyers." Nathalie added. "I can offer you office space and suites of your own here in the Garden. Your work for me will teach you how to handle social

minefields and how to get others to do most of the real work for you. I'll teach you how I distract the Grand Matron's Council so they leave me alone when I want them to. Would you rather face Madam Misko in a cozy conference room or on the surface of a frozen lake?"

"Am I going to have to tell Tom Cruise 'no' again?" Fleur asked.

Fleur still remembered the first time she ever visited Nathalie at the Garden a few years ago. Segolene fought to keep from laughing. She loved that story.

"I'm quite sure Tom remembers you Fleur, but do not despair. He is much more of a gentleman than some of the others you will have to deal with. And I saw some of the job offers you got after the tournament. You'll be meeting more than one of those people while working for me."

Fleur turned to her partner in crime. "What do you think?"

Segolene grinned. "Do you even have to ask?"

Fleur looked skyward, took a deep breath and slowly let it back out. "Let's do it."

Nathalie thanked Fleur as Segolene let out her best Evil Genius laugh in the background.

"Sooo..." Fleur asked after giving Segolene a moment to calm down, "where do we sign?"

Nathalie held up one finger before quickly pulling something out of one of her desk's drawers.

"That is not a contract." Fleur said as she stared at the object in Nathalie's hand.

"This is much better." Nathalie returned. "I'll let you read over the contracts later but for now I really like the symbolism. I do this with all my girls."

Segolene giggled and took the shiny red apple from Nathalie's hand. She opened wide and tore out as big a chunk as she could manage

before handing the apple to Fleur. Fleur snorted and took a bite as well.

"Welcome to the Garden, ladies. I'm sure you will enjoy your time here. Everyone does."

-o\0/o-

Gabby steadied herself as soon as the hooking sensation left. No falling on bottoms for her. Unlike Harry, Gabby spent many long hours in dance practice working on balance, poise and flexibility and it all paid off when it came to magical travel. Flooing was easy, portkeys were a breeze and brooms were second nature. Okay, so maybe having some avian genes helped with the flying but the other two were hard earned skills. Little Angel patted down her sky blue skirt, took a moment to admire the lace fringe on her socks and boldly stepped into the main Joliebatons hallway.

And then she walked right into a group of students coming in from the floo lobby. It really wouldn't have been any trouble had Gabby herself been a normal student. Gabby apologized of course. She should have gotten a 'don't worry' maybe or a 'look where you're going' in response. Alas, Gabby was anything but normal.

Three boys and a girl all stood there and gawked. That was exactly what Gabby hated about being an angel. Granted, everything else about being an angel was super awesome. But the gawking... she could do without it.

Luckily, she now knew how to deal with it.

"I saiiiiid," Little Angel's eyes flashed softly, "Excuuussee mmeeeeee..."

"Um... yeah." Was one boy's intelligent response.

Without another word, the four students stopped staring and went their own way. Gabby composed herself and restarted her walk to Professor Royal's room.

It took her a minute to realize that the students she ran into were coming from the floo lobby. Hey, wasn't that supposed to be closed?

The little silver-blond made her way through the hall and then down another. When she caught someone in the crowd staring too much she flashed her eyes to make them overlook her, but she really didn't catch too many gawkers this time. Her mind was on other things.

"Gabby!" "Gabby!"

"Hey, Gigi. Aimee." Gabrielle took her seat by her two very good friends. She would never angel eyeflash them. "How did you come to school today?"

Gigi smiled. "The floo."

"Headmaster reopened them over the weekend." Aimee added.

"Thanks for killing the bad guy, Gabby."

"Yeah, thanks."

But... but... and they didn't know...

"That's nice I guess." Gabby muttered.

"You don't have to use those yucky portkeys anymore. And flooing to that other building and crossing the street was stupid." Aimee added.

"And it's cold out there. If not for Maman's warming charms, I would have frozen my butt off last week." Gigi elaborated.

Gabby really didn't know what to say to her friends. Sure lots of bad guys got beat but even with Voldemort split in half he was still scary to her. Still dangerous to just about everybody.

The little Veela paid just enough attention to the beginning of class to say 'present' when Professor Royal called attendance. She was able to answer any questions put to her too even if her heart wasn't really in it today. Inside, most of Gabby's brainpower was working on the problem of safety. Momma trained her good. She knew the grown-ups were relaxing too soon- even Harry could tell. They were making it easier for dark wizards to get at her and they didn't even

know it. Momma would have to be told; by the end of the day Gabby could think of nothing else.

Well, there was one other thing Gabby thought about today. Absolon was still a pest.

-o\0/o-

crunch – crunch – crunch

Ginny slowly made her way around Black Lake in near silence. Cold as it was, none of the forest creatures nearby were showing signs of life and the giant squid appeared to be hiding from the colder air above it's home. Silence suited the youngest Weasley very well as she was not in a talkative mood.

Finally she reached her destination. It was at the far side of the lake from the castle... bit of a nice hike really... and there was not another living soul around, far as she could tell.

Perfect.

Ginny pulled her wand out and aimed a mild banishing spell at her chosen target. The force of the spell blew away all the snow before her. This exposed a small patch of frozen brown grass wrapping around a smooth black stone memorial. Harry's grave.

She pulled a small bouquet out of her robes and gently placed it atop the cold stone.

"White lilies and baby's-breath for innocence and purity. I've added marigolds and aloe for grief." The redheaded witch spoke to the stone.

"I'm over here, you know." A voice called out behind her. A dog barked in support.

"Shut it Potter." Ginny didn't bother looking over her shoulder. "I'm mourning the Boy Who Lived, the boy I've been in love with for as long as I can remember. I finally figured out that the Boy Who Lived and Harry Potter were two different people, and that's why today I'm mourning him and not you."

"Ahhhh..." The ghost replied. His dogfather snorted and went back to licking himself.

So technically she did not make this trek alone, but there truly wasn't another living soul nearby. Ginny returned to her task of explaining the bouquet.

"The carnations, being mauve, are for my dreams of a future with you- or rather who I thought you were. My dreams turned out to be quite the fantasy, didn't they? I tied it together with witch-hazel, of course."

"Where did you get all of these flowers?" Harry asked. It was winter in Scotland after all. "Did you have an upper year transfigure them?"

Ginny frowned at the thought. "They are real you insensitive prat. I collected them myself with Professor Sprout's permission. Greenhouse one is stocked with all of the harmless flowering plants... anything you might want to put in a bouquet or wreath or vase."

Harry looked confused. Ginny noticed. It was kind of cute in a pathetic way. She smirked.

"Greenhouse one doesn't really get used in class. It's more functional like the greenhouses that house elves use for spices and seasoning. With all the flowers constantly in bloom, greenhouse one is good for dates during the school year."

Harry looked at Padfoot to see if he knew about any of that. The dog stopped licking himself just long enough to give his godson a 'of course I knew. I was such a stud back in the day' look. Actually, that look was quite impressive coming from a canine.

"Anyway," Ginny continued, "It feels like he's missing now, you know?"

"Maybe it's because I'm right here?" Harry pointed at himself.

Ginny narrowed her eyes at the prat. "Yeah, but even after you showed up all floaty and see-through, I still felt like you were down there too, especially once you flew off to France. I visited- well, I mostly wept over this black stone two or three times a week."

Harry looked down to his feet.

"Sorry. I didn't know."

She nodded slightly and continued. "That changed when someone came and... well... you know..." Harry nodded. "So anyway, after they cleaned up the mess and put the stone back together, well, it just seemed hollow. It felt like you weren't there anymore."

Harry new better than to use the same joke three times. Sirius would have done it had he not been playing the part of four legged bastard as opposed to the two legged variety.

"And so here I am, paying my respects to the dead idea of a boy who never really existed in the first place." Ginny finished.

"I'm sure that if the Boy Who Lived was real and if he were here with you right now then he'd be very thankful for your flower arranging efforts. He'd be very touched." Harry added.

"Oh would he then?" Ginny challenged.

"Yes." Harry answered. "If he were here with you right now, he'd tell you all about how his wicked aunt made him tend her garden from a very young age and that he learned how to cultivate flowers the hard way: getting stuck by rose thorns and bleeding everywhere. And if he trimmed the bush improperly then he'd be sent to bed without supper. Yes... if such a boy were real then he'd have a great appreciation for those who pick and arrange their own flowers."

"Really?" Ginny squeaked.

"Really."

"I never knew."

Ginny looked very sad, like she'd never imagined that the Boy Who Lived could have had that kind of childhood. Her eyes looked like they were holding back the beginnings of tears.

"I never told anyone." He said simply.

The young witch suddenly took in a deep breath. Harry thought maybe she was trying to keep herself from sobbing. Ginny then took two purposeful steps to bring herself directly in front of the young specter.

"I'm Ginevra Weasley and I'm very pleased to meet you." She dipped into a light curtsy. "Most people call me Ginny."

Harry smiled and held out his hand.

"Hello Ginny. I'm Harry Potter. Charmed, I'm sure."

Ginny, whose eyes were suspiciously bright, smiled and reached out to shake Harry's hand. Her hand passed right through his. She tried again. She failed again.

Ginny's giggles soon filled the air. Padfoot started barking. He loved physical comedy. Harry smirked though his silver blush. Maybe if he had tried to clasp her hand instead of the other way around, that might have worked.

-o\0/o-

"Monsieur Delacour." A soft voice called.

Alain stretched over his desk, placed a finger on the Department Seal and answered his secretary's call. "Yes, Guillmette?"

"Monsieur Potter has arrived."

"Send him in please." Alain withdrew his finger from the seal and nodded to someone else in the room.

A moment later, the office door opened and the young English ghost passed through.

"Alain." Harry called in greeting. Then he noticed who else was already there. "And Madam Bones... or is it Minister Bones?"

Amelia stood up and greeted the boy. "Good afternoon Mister Potter. And I am now the Acting Minister for Magic thanks to the ICW. There will be elections later... but probably not until April or May."

"Well I'll tell everyone I know to vote for you then." Harry added with a smile.

Ameila looked like she'd eaten something sour. "I would rather have my old post back. At least I knew who I could trust and who to keep an eye on in the MLE. These days I'm telling near strangers what to do and just hoping that they know how to follow instructions."

Harry froze, not knowing quite how to react. Alain chuckled and added a bit more to the brandy snifter Amelia had been nursing before Harry came in.

"I'm sure the ICW can be counted on to help you keep everyone in line a few months longer, Amelia." The man took a sip from his own glass. "It's getting them to leave afterwards that will be sending you to the healers with high blood pressure this time next year."

Amelia looked longingly at the provided alcohol but refrained. She addressed Harry.

"Mister Potter-"

"Just Harry, please..." Harry interrupted.

Amelia nodded but her next topic of conversation would not allow her to smile. "Harry, then. I'm here to inform you of some troubling facts we recently learned about your relatives."

Harry motioned that he was listening. Amelia cleared her throat.

"Five days ago, the muggle Police in Surrey responded to a call at number four Privet Drive. I'm sorry to say that your uncle has passed on." Amelia paused there. Oddly, Harry did not seem to have any visible reaction. She continued. "Inside, they found the body of Vernon Dursely. There were no physical marks or clues about cause of death other than the look on his face which was apparently quite pained. While the muggle autopsy report is not due for another week or two, our aurors found enough evidence to support exposure to the Cruciatus Curse. We believe the Killing Curse was used to end his life."

Harry thought for a moment.

"But why were aurors there to begin with. To be quite honest I would rather have had the aurors visit on occasion when I still lived there, not a year after I died. It's been about two years since I set foot in that house."

Not what Amelia expected at all.

"Even with the strain on our resources, it is vital that the DMLE continue to search for magical interference in the muggle world. With a blood relative of yours in residence, Privet Drive was near the top of the watch list. Sadly, the response team did not arrive early enough to save your uncle or to rescue your aunt."

"Wait." Harry was interested now. "Petunia's missing?"

Amelia nodded. "We currently believe someone apparated nearby, assaulted your uncle, took your aunt and left the way they came in. None of the nearby muggles witnessed the attack."

"Do you know if they went after my cousin Dudley?" Harry asked.

Amelia squinted in concentration. "The muggles weren't looking for a second missing person. Are you sure he lived there?"

"I wouldn't know anymore. It's been too long. I suppose you could check Smeltings... thought I'd bet all the gold in Gringotts that he's been expelled by now." Harry offered.

"The point is," Alain cut in, "that a blood relative of yours- or possibly two- has been abducted. Add that to the prior theft of your body from the grave at Hogwarts and we are very concerned. If these two acts are related then they point to some very dark magic being performed."

Dark magic, he said. Blood magic is what he meant. Damn.

"What rotten timing too." Harry mentioned, though perhaps he should have kept that one to himself.

"What do you mean?" Amelia had seen dozens of suspects let slip something important before and this sounded no different.

Harry improvised. "It's just that I'm not kidding about wanting those aurors to have visited earlier. I'm not celebrating Vernon's death but I'll not be mourning it either. Aunt Petunia being missing is disturbing though. Have we any idea of where she may have been taken?"

"Nothing." Amelia answered regretfully. "While this crime is likely You Know Who's work, we have no solid proof it is him. Now that his forces have been flushed out of the Ministry building we don't have any clue as to where they may be keeping her."

All three were silent for a moment. Alain chose to break the silence before it became uncomfortable.

"There is another reason Amelia and I wished to talk to you today, Harry."

"Oh?" Harry was thankful for the distraction. Visions of Angel-Gabby battling Zombie-Harry were filling his head. They were not pleasant.

"We are three weeks away from the first anniversary of the Second Task." Alain pointed out.

"Has it been a year already?" Harry asked. "I hadn't really noticed. I wonder if Nick or Myrtle have been planning anything for me?"

"Nick and Myrtle?" Alain asked.

"Two of the ghosts at Hogwarts. I may have mentioned them... or not..." Harry tried to explain.

"You see... the dead don't seem to pay much attention to the passage of time from what I've seen," Both Alain and Amelia shared a look over the ghost talking about ghosts from an outsider's perspective. "Except when it comes time to celebrate the anniversary of their death. Nearly Headless Nick had a big to do on his deathday. Ron, Mione and I went to it. I actually met Myrtle for the first time there at the party."

"Harry," Ameila cut in. "On behalf of the Ministry of Magic I would like to officially invite you to Hogwarts Castle on February the twenty-fourth for a memorial service."

"Oh..." Harry was surprised, though now that he thought about it there was no reason he should be surprised.

Amelia spoke up again before he could reply. "I have invited all of the Champions and their families as well as all those who were there that day. There will also be political and international guests there as well."

Alain chose to help Amelia explain things. "It won't all be about the Second Task, of course. This is the first event the new interim ministry has planned since assuming power. They intend to start with memorials for you and for all those who have died in the following troubles. Sacrifices will be recognized. Heroes will be rewarded. History will be made."

"How so?" Harry asked.

Amelia continued Alain's explanation. "Mr. Po- Harry... we've put a lot of thought into this and we think that the actions of two individuals deserve special recognition."

"Eh... who?"

"Why you, Harry. You and Gabrielle." Amelia answered. Alain's face was glowing with pride now. "Both of you shall receive an Order of Merlin, First Class. This will be the first time a deceased person has ever received the award for actions taken after their demise. It is also the first time in centuries a French witch has received the award. She will also be the youngest recipient on record. You are both officially receiving the award for destroying the Dementor hoard that threatened to take every soul in Hogwarts and Hogsmeade on the fourteenth."

"Unofficially, these awards also cover the various battles the two of you have fought and won against not only Voldemort," At least Alain could say the name, "but also the old corrupt Ministry of Magic as well."

"Wizarding Britain may be diminished in numbers but we now shine all the brighter as a great shadow has left us." Amelia said proudly.

"Except he's still out there." Harry challenged.

"We'll get him, Harry." Amelia answered his challenge. "His followers are dead and broken. He is only a shadow of his former self."

Alain read the concern on his spectral son's face. "Yes we know he's seen setbacks like this before but he had a support system in place before. It's gone now. If he shows himself in public, we'll find him and bind his spirit so that he'll never be able to roam free again."

Harry wanted to believe that these two would be able to deliver on their promise. He really wanted to. Sadly, he couldn't.

It was just Voldemort and Harry in Nineteen eighty-one. It was just the two of them again in Ninety-two and again in Ninety-three. It was just Harry and Gabby versus a Dark Lord last month and that was with ICW forces nearby too. Harry couldn't help but expect that he and his Angel would meet Voldemort one more time in open conflict... and only once was the best case scenario.

"Whatever security you have planned for this thing at Hogwarts, double- no, triple it." Harry said.

"I assure you we will be quite well protected Mister Potter." Amelia was shocked that Harry would automatically assume the plans for security were in any way lacking. "What makes you think we need to increase our auror presence?"

Harry looked between the two top magical ministry officials and replied with the one bit of insight only Harry Potter or perhaps Albus Dumbledore would know from experience.

"I don't know what Voldemort was like before he killed my parents, but he's made a habit of going after me on special occasions and I don't believe he'll wait for next Halloween to try again."

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Luna Lovegood relaxed. Her shoes had been kicked off, her cloak spread behind her like a blanket and her uniform hat sat off to the side. She loved the feel of soft grass as it tickled at her neck and she was feeling plenty of that tickle now. Luna had found for herself a small spot at the edge of the Beauxbatons athletic field where she could relax and watch little blurs zip this way and that in the cloudless sky above.

No, not Nargles... not Wrackspurts nor even Blibbering Humdingers though she was keen to search school grounds for some of those later. Today, Luna was watching the school broom racing team practice.

And now they were coming her way.

Luna reached over to her other hat and tapped her wand to an activation rune.

RRRROOOOOAAAAAARRRRRRR

She did hope Hermione noticed her hat. It was very Gryffindor with a Lion head on top and everything. True, Hermione wasn't in Gryffindor anymore and they weren't in Hogwarts anymore but then Luna had always wanted to cheer the Gryffie quidditch team on and she wasn't about to ignore the hat now that it was finished and it worked.

Just in case Hermione hadn't noticed her hat, Luna had also charmed all the grass around her to be red and gold.

Five laps later, all of the broom riders came back down on the far side of the field. Luna began transfiguring the charmed blades of grass into red and gold butterflies. Ten minutes later, one of the broom riders broke from the group and flew over to Luna's spot.

"Isn't it a little cold out to be lying in the grass with no shoes or coat on?" Hermione called from two meters up.

Luna looked up without really focusing on anything. "I spent two winters in Scotland and part of one in Azkaban. Daddy and I used to go on expeditions through fjords and across glaciers. Southern France is quite toasty in comparison." Luna finally focused on her adoptive sister. "Who are you to talk? I've never seen an outfit like that one before."

Hermione dismounted her Firebolt and walked through the grass to sit by Luna's side. It may still be winter but there was no snow on the ground here. Most of the flora on Beauxbatons school grounds had been charmed evergreen centuries ago and snow rarely made any attempt to challenge the groundskeepers.

"I'm wearing the team uniform." Hermione replied. "If quidditch players would ever consider getting rid of those bulky cloaks and leathers then they might just find the average speed of a game jump up a lot higher."

Hermione was wearing a close fitting outfit that looked less magical and more muggle in design. She wore pure white trainers with low cut socks. At the other end of her mostly exposed legs were a pair of light blue silk short-shorts with gold trim covering white skintight spandex. Above that, Hermione wore a white and blue striped silk shirt with gold detailing and the school crest, front and back. This was again worn over white spandex. Hermione also wore white leather gloves as frostbite and blisters were both to be avoided.

Her hair was, as is now the standard, in a tight French braid. For that matter, so was Luna's. Tradition and all that.

"Has Harry seen you wearing that?" Luna teased.

"Maybe..." Hermione blushed lightly and looked away. "But he has not seen me fly in it yet. Not at full speed at least."

"But you were going full speed just then, weren't you?" Luna asked.

Hermione smiled brilliantly. "I was second place in the first heat-though I only made fourth in the second... I think they got used to my new-found courage. Still that's no replacement for skill. If I'm lucky I may get to compete against another school in early summer. Captain Lambert is optimistic about my chances, at least."

As if summoned, Captain Lambert appeared in the sky not far away from the two English transplants.

"Hermione! We're all going to the Dining Hall together after we get changed. Bring your new friend if you want to." The upper year wizard called.

Hermione looked hopefully at Luna who herself looked thrown for a loop. She was being included? In a group activity? By an attractive male?

Hermione look back at her team captain. "We'll be there!"

As Captain Lambert turned to fly away, Hermione poked a now blushing Luna in the ribs.

"I thought you were playing for the other team. Have you gotten over Fleur so quickly?" Hermione teased.

Luna blushed harder. "No, not at all. The... you know what... made sure that I still love Fleur and I think I always will, but it didn't make me a lesbian. I still fancy boys."

"Maybe a certain boy Captain?" Hermione pushed. "He does a lot of tutoring, you know. In subjects you're behind in even."

"Does he now?" Luna asked softly. She was now unable to look Hermione in the eye.

"He's single too."

"R- really?"

"Oh yes."

"I suddenly find myself quite famished." Luna blurted out while getting to her feet. "Come sister. Let's get you out of those things and into the Dining Room."

Hermione giggled like a schoolgirl and got up as well. "Look at me playing matchmaker. Segolene would be ever so proud!"

"Did you know," Luna added quickly, "that both Venus and Sirius will be prominent tonight?"

"I thought you dropped divination in order to take more non-magical classes." The spandex clad witch replied.

"It's a legitimate observation for both astrology and astronomy, sister dear."

Hermione smirked. "If you say so."

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Alain closed the door to his personal study and leaned against it in relief. The screaming match was much harder to hear through the solid wood door than when he was out in the hall.

"Poppa?" A soft voice called from behind his desk.

Alain turned around to find a small head of silver-blond hair partially hidden behind rich oak.

"Yes Little Angel?" He answered.

"Is Momma going to kill Fleur?" A very frightened Gabby asked.

Alain sighed. "No, my sweet little Gabrielle. Your mother would never kill her own firstborn."

There was a short pause in the yelling outside Alain's study. He was about to use that as proof of his statement when the unholy shriek of a fully transformed Veela shook the building, floorboards and all.

Gabby ducked further behind her father's desk as the man himself strained to hear more through the door. He briefly considered reopening it until a second shriek of avian fury tore through their home.

The rapid thumps of someone sprinting down the hall quickly passed their position.

"I think that was your sister running for the ward line. Do not worry Little Angel, things will work out in the end. Trust me."

Alain was able to maintain his calm facade for another thirty seconds... just long enough for an enraged Veela to bash open his door. Gabby dove for cover. Alain wanted to badly, but he stood his ground.

"What seems to be the problem, my love?" Alain said bravely. He palmed his wand discreetly.

Apolline gave a short, loud bark. Gabby moaned from within her secret fortress. Alain noticed a sheath of papers gripped angrily in the Veela's left claws.

"Perhaps if I..." Alain slowly raised his own left hand towards the papers.

Enraged as she was, Apolline was still a sentient creature and she knew what her husband was asking for. Slowly, reluctantly she offered the damning evidence to him. He took it. As soon as the papers were turned over, the angry Veela turned from her mate and her younger chick to storm out of the room. Setting innocents on fire would not help anyone.

The uncomfortable silence was only broken by the sniffles of a crying girl.

"Perhaps, my sweet angel, you might like to sit in my lap as I look over these papers your mother left for me?" Alain offered.

There was no reply except for a scrambling little girl desperate for the safety of Poppa's lap. Once he was seated and once Gabrielle was comfortable, he began to read.

"Oh, Fleur." Alain whispered. "What have you done?"

Being the experienced ministry official with influence in law enforcement, he read Fleur's contract with the Garden... and Segolene's as well... line by line from start to finish. By the time Gabrielle was asleep in his arms Alain thought maybe it wasn't quite so bad as originally thought. A few minutes later, a human looking Apolline stepped softly into the room.

"My daughter is a whore." She said. "Where did I go wrong?"

"I think, perhaps, you may have begun yelling before she could fully explain herself?" Alain offered cautiously.

"She- no. They both work for Nathalie now. What is there to explain?"

"These contracts..." Alain re-adjusted his sleeping angel to get more comfortable. "They don't expressly prohibit sleeping with the clients but they don't focus on it either. They are drawn up for executive level work. Administration services. Not sex."

The Veela mother didn't look convinced but she was listening.

"Nathalie came to me with one of her contracts years ago... she wanted a genuine legal opinion." Alain continued. "Of course I had ministry experts run over it to make sure our family was protected. That contract actually was for whoring and it was nothing like this one."

Alain looked at his wife and did so with as much confidence as he could muster.

"Our daughter is not a whore. I daresay tomorrow will be a much better day to sit down with Fleur and discuss why she is not a whore in a calm, fireball free environment."

Apolline seemed to close her eyes and breathe deeply. Suddenly a great deal of tension left her frame.

"I'll take the little one to bed, husband dear... and then you can do the same for me."

Alain let her take their daughter from his lap in silence. He had deflected her ire for now, but there was still one problem that Fleur had either knowingly or unknowingly unleashed upon their household. She was not a whore... but many, many people would quickly assume that she was when her employment becomes public.

There went any chance for Alain to become the next Minister of Magic. His political opponents would never let this go, and not even a miracle on the scale that Gabrielle can provide would be able to turn things around.

At least there was a silver lining to this cloud. Apolline was clearly too keyed up to actually sleep once the married couple made it to bed. Judging by the fact that she actually went full bird tonight she should be full of emotion and energy needing release. Alain may very well see the sun rise before she tired herself out and let him get any rest.

On his way out of the study, Alain called upon Virginie to supply him with a dose each of energy potion and stamina potion. Despite the troubles, it was nights like this that made him feel justified in marrying a Veela all those years ago.

End Chapter

Chapter Notes:

And now a little word about some of my Veela because my OC's always have a person/character that they are based off of. Madame Loren: I always figured Sophia Loren could be a Veela. It took a really long time for her age to catch up to her. One could argue it still hasn't. Madame Ewing: Not that anyone probably got it, but that was a reference to the old show Dallas and the oil baron family portrayed therein. I never did learn who shot J.R., maybe Madame Ewing did. Not that I've figured out how to stick her in the story but I figure Marilyn Monroe would make a great Veela. CIA offed her 'cause she got too close to the most powerful man alive.

Chapter Twenty-eight: Edem

Hermione looked up as her door opened.

"Mione." Harry called in greeting with Gabby parroting his call quickly after.

"Come in." The young English witch answered without moving, too caught up in her reading to actually look at her two guests.

Harry looked around her room.

"You know, 'Mione, most people spend time in their dreams... well... dreaming."

Hermione could hear the smirk in Harry's comment. Gabby's snicker was even easier to spot. Hermione slowly closed her eyes and took in a deep breath. A few seconds later she let it out. Finally, she closed her book and stood to face her interlopers.

"You know me, Harry." Hermione explained. "I can't keep away from my studies."

The witch smoothed out her skirt and walked over to Gabby's hug-ready open arms.

"You do seem to be keeping up rather well," Harry murmured before getting his own hug with a kiss on top, "nothing at all like third year."

Hermione's cheeks pinked. "Time turners don't work the same way. Professor McGonagall did point out the issues involved in balancing extra sleep time with extra waking time. I was just a bit too enthusiastic back then. I wanted to get the absolute most out of my education..."

"Of course." Harry said knowingly.

Gabby giggled. Not that she knew why Harry thought this was funny- she didn't understand at all- but Harry was happy and that was enough.

"Sooooooo..." Hermione fished for a topic change. "What shall we do tonight?"

Everyone ignored the bright, sunshiny day right outside Hermione's dormitory window.

"Welllll..." Harry countered. "I was thinking we could try something."

"Yes?" Hermione prodded.

Gabby answered. "Harry going to do his homework!"

Hermione blink-blinked.

"Really?"

It was Harry's turn to feel embarrassed.

"Right, well they did say I'd have lessons to work on from time to time." He explained vaguely. "I thought you might want to take part."

"What are you talking about, Harry?" Hermione asked.

"He takes classes at Angel School just like me." Gabby said, very happy to tell Hermione things that the older witch has never heard before. That doesn't happen very often.

"And what does this homework entail?" Hermione asked.

Harry seemed to focus himself for a moment before answering. "You remember that day- er night that Lucifer put you to sleep, right?"

Hermoine nodded.

"She entered your dream to stop us from doing something we aren't allowed to do. That doesn't mean, however, that we can't meet with her unless one of us tries to break a rule." Harry paused, idly running his hand through Gabby's silky hair. "In fact, the magic that made that trip work for both Lucifer and Luna will allow us to setup another meeting like that one."

"We're going to have a dream conference call?" The witch in Beauxbatons blue asked.

Harry tilted his head. "A what?"

"A conference call. It's when you connect more than two lines in a telephone call." Hermione answered without effort.

"Err, yes?" Harry asked-answered.

"Very well." Hermione said, eager to try something new and different. "What part do you wish for me to play in this?"

"I thought you might like to tag along mostly. Ask questions. If I get tripped up you could help me figure it all out."

Hermione nodded. She was quite happy with observation and troubleshooting duties.

"Permission to mess with your dreams again?"

Hermione wriggled her nose as she'd done countless times by now. "Permission granted."

Harry bowed to his hostess and strolled over to the door out. He paused and focused a great deal of attention on the handle. His fingers wrapped around the handle firmly and, after another pause, he turned the knob.

click

Hermione was interested to see that the scenery on the other side of her dormitory door was not the rest of the Beauxbatons girls' dormitories. Now it seemed to be a small valley with a very starry night sky. She was already on the move to take a look at this new place when the door suddenly filled with the dream teleconference's third party.

Deep tan. White-blond hair. Lavender eyes. A body to die for.

"Lucifer." Harry greeted warmly.

Gabby wasn't quite so reserved.

"Lucifer!" The little girl shot through the room and leapt onto the older angel's chest in a tight hug.

"Hi, kid!" Lucifer hugged Gabby back while smiling warmly at the two teens. "Harry. Miss Granger. Mind if I come in?"

Hermione braced herself. With any luck she wouldn't be smote by the fallen angel a second time.

"Be my guest." Hermione swept her hand back in an inviting gesture. It was her dorm after all.

"You're solid this time!" Gabby squeaked.

Lucifer walked into the room with a little Veela stuck to her front. She sat on the edge of Hermione's bed and looked around.

"You remember what I told you, Harry?"

Harry nodded. "Think clearly about what I want and how it should interact with the environment. Right?"

Lucifer nodded to her mind magic student while tickling Gabby's ribcage. The little girl squealed like a little girl.

"I'd say you got it right." Lavender eyes turned to brown. "Harry tells me you have a question or two to ask?"

She got to ask questions? Really? Hermione's reaction was obvious enough to make Harry laugh. She hit him on the shoulder in punishment.

"Ow!" Harry exclaimed half-seriously. "Look. I know you and the others had these long lists of questions that you wanted answered when I took Gabby into the Hall of Angels and we never really stuck to the approved lists when we went before."

Harry rubbed his shoulder while sending a mock pout back to his girlfriend. She tried valiantly to maintain her righteous indignation.

"I figured you might take the opportunity to ask one of those questions now while Lucifer is here to answer it."

Righteous indignation was forgotten. She got to ask a fallen angel questions! Hermione's head snapped around and she turned her thousand watt smile towards Lucifer.

Harry laughed again, but he was ignored this time.

"Do you mind? Answering a question or two that is?" The brown haired witch blurted.

"Not at all Miss Granger." Lucifer replied softly.

And now she had to pick which one. Which to choose...there were too many! Hermione's mind almost blanked trying to pick the best first question.

"House elves!" She squeaked.

"Really? House elves?" Harry asked, confused. It certainly wouldn't have been his first pick.

"Don't you see Harry? If Lucifer here is as old as we believe her to be then she might know what happened to them- I mean, why they need our magic and why they don't have any of their own anymore." Hermione looked back to Lucifer almost pleadingly. "That is, if you know... and if you don't mind sharing."

Lucifer, who still hadn't let go of Gabby, smirked. "I do know and I don't mind sharing."

"Story time!" Gabby shouted into Lucifer's shoulder.

"I should start by saying that it wasn't just the elves." Lucifer began. She lost her smirk. "Wizards claim to live in the Wizarding World, and they do keep to themselves mostly, but you must understand that there is really only one world, one Earth, one Gaia. All beings be they sentient or not, be they magical or not, live as part of a larger whole. Magic has been a part of this one world system for as long as life itself has been around and both can rise and fall like the tides."

"So house elves suffered a loss of their magic during a magical low tide?" Hermione jumped ahead.

"It was far more all encompassing than that. Dobby's ancestors were forced to change or perish but at least they still existed. There has been more than one magical mass extinction in the world's history

just as there have been non-magical extinctions. Sometimes the magical and non-magical extinctions are concurrent and sometimes they are not. Magical creatures are actually far more robust and adaptable than their non-magical counterparts... but they do suffer from a weakness that non-magical creatures are effectively immune to. That weakness is a dependency on the availability of natural free magic in their environment. To be more specific, they need access to ley lines."

"So when Dobby says that elves be loosing- I mean when elves lost their magic, what really happened was that the natural level of ambient free magic fell?" Hermione asked.

Lucifer nodded. "There have been times where the ley lines themselves were both closer to the surface and also stronger. To borrow an expression, you could practically cut the magic in the air with a knife, it was so thick. As you may have noticed, this is not the case today. The modern world is currently near a magical low tide. Many wonderful beautiful creatures were not strong enough to survive with reduced ambient magic. They needed it as we need air. They perished and we are poorer for their loss. Then there are some races like the house elves who adapted to survive. Much as you may suspect dark wizardry, Miss Granger, there is none involved in this story."

Gabby held up her hand. Lucifer ignored for a moment that they were not actually in school and pointed to her favorite student.

"What dinosaurs were magical?" The little angel asked eagerly. Of course. Almost every primary school student alive knows about dinosaurs.

Lucifer smiled at Gabby's enthusiasm. Amazingly, she also answered the question.

"Dragons had to come from somewhere, right? A line of small raptors developed the ability to breath fire. Then they got wings. Then they got bigger."

Lucifer had stunned her audience. They were enchanted, entranced by the story. Why stop there?

"I have said that there were magical creatures that evolved and those that did not. House elves are a very recent example of this as their story is less than two thousand years old. There were also more than a few beasts who felt the magic leaving and hid themselves, falling into a deep slumber until magic returns to the level they prefer. If you are lucky you will never meet any of these beasts. They are not to be trifled with."

"Why are we not taught about this in History of Magic? Not even Beauxbatons teaches this in history class." Hermione wondered aloud. "How did you learn all this?"

Lucifer answered. "I and my sisters know of these happenings but you will not meet a wizard nor will you read of one that knew any of it. I served my Lord for years uncounted before the fall. As for what came before me, well, my Lord and His angels were not the only beings to pay attention to such things."

Hermione was buzzing with excitement. She had no idea. Looking back, it all seemed terribly logical that nature itself would be responsible for such widespread changes and not some powerful wizard with a hatred for free magical beings. It was refreshing to see logic applied to magic even if she had to look back thousands or tens of thousands of years to find it.

The British witch in Beauxbatons blue turned to her spectral love and said airily, "You are the best boyfriend ever."

Harry looked immensely pleased with himself. Who could have imagined a single question would earn him so many relationship bonus points?

"You're welcome."

-o\0/o-

-ding-

The door to the lift slid open.

tak – tak - tak

The sound of a woman crossing the lobby in high heels brought two hushed conversations to a halt. Several pairs of eyes searched for the origin of the noise.

The heels were expensive- custom Italian no doubt – and the legs they were attached to were works of art. The woman wore a tight cloak like a smooth silk sheath holding close to her natural curves. Unfortunately for the men looking on, her cloak's hood was pulled up revealing nothing more than a single shock of long silver-blond hair cascading down the front of the robe to one side.

The few men in the lobby held their silence as she walked across the lobby to an ornate pair of gilded floral themed doors. As she closed to within two steps of the doors, both heavy panels began to silently swing inwards. It would seem that the wards recognized her. Only after the door closed behind her did any of those men seem to regain their voices. Please God, they said, let her be starting her shift soon. If only they knew her name.

On the other side of the door, a sharply dressed young woman greeted her visitor.

"Welcome back to the Garden Madame Delacour." The woman bowed slightly. "I do not believe Miss Nathalie is expecting you. Shall I inform her of your arrival?"

The visitor lowered her cloak. The younger woman was correct. It was Apolline. Apolline shook her head in response to the question.

"That is not necessary Nicole. Is my daughter here? I would very much like to speak with her."

Nicole was about to respond when a small interruption occurred.

POP

"Dopey has come to escort Miss Apolline to Miss Fleur... if Miss Apolline promises not to make fire in the Garden."

Apolline nodded stiffly.

"Thank you very much Dopey." Nicole spoke to the elf before turning back to the older Veela. "If you would please follow Dopey..."

"Of course. Thank you."

Apolline acknowledged the younger woman before following the much shorter elf through the Garden's main entry foyer and up into private office territory. The elf and Veela passed girls relaxing on their brake, cigarette in hand. A few Veela were resting in the employee lounge in their underwear munching on breakfast cereal and watching cartoons. Two halls further along, Apolline was sure she heard a man's voice through one of the doors. There seemed to be some issue with the new tax code and what could or could not be considered an acceptable business expense. Accounting then. Still, Apolline was impressed to hear a man's voice this deep into the employee side of the building.

Even Alain has never ventured this deep into Veela territory before.

The two finally came to a halt in front of a single frosted glass door. Dopey motioned for Apolline to wait a moment as he pop'd into the room and then back out again. He opened the door for her.

"Miss Fleur and Miss Segolene will see you now."

Apolline pulled herself together and stepped into the room.

"Mother." Fleur called coldly. "I have quite a lot of whoring to do today so if you have something to say, please keep it short."

Apolline bit back her retort as well as her desire to transform. She had promised both her husband and that house elf that she wouldn't be throwing any fire around. Even if Fleur was asking for it. She was here to make peace no matter how it irked her. She took in her surroundings.

Fleur was sitting at the head of a massive conference table. Segolene sat to Fleur's right with a notebook and a thick stack of photos spread out between the two of them. A little further down on the same side of the table, Marion stood between two chairs hovering over several enlarged photographs and a whole pile of notebooks and artifacts. On the other side of the table, two women (Veela by the looks of them) who Apolline did not know were pouring over books on runic languages and Hellenistic Greek.

"If this is whoring," Apolline replied, "then I really have to rework the games I play with your father. I do not think he will approve of the changes."

Marion couldn't keep a smirk from forming. Segolene snorted.

"What's so funny?" One of the new girls asked Marion in English. She was ignored. "Fine... whatever."

Apolline pushed forward. "Your father and I have looked through those contracts. I must admit that they were not as bad as I imagined." Mother and daughter locked eyes. "I still think you are wrong to do this. Please, Little Princess, think about what you are doing to the family."

Fleur's eyebrow twitched. Using her childhood nickname was hitting below the belt.

"I am doing this for the family Maman. I am doing this for Gabrielle."

"What of your father? You know he has always done what is best for us. Think of the place he holds in society. Do not hurt the family by associating with your cousin's business." Apolline pleaded her case. "The Delacours will be the laughing stock of Paris once your father's rivals learn of your employer."

"I need the skills that she can teach me, Maman." Fleur's ripost came quick on the heels of her mother's plea.

"Pass me runic codex, would you?" Marion called out to one of her assistants, trying very hard not to be part of the family drama passing up and down the table.

"Here ya go." One of the girls shoved the book in question across the table, paper swishing over wood between breaths.

"I could teach you."

"I need different skills then you can teach."

"You father."

"He's far too busy and Nathalie's help is more practical."

"My mother."

"She is what I need lessons against, Maman." Fleur looked at her mother with something akin to pity. "We seek to change the world where Régine seeks to hold it firm. We seek to build a safe place for Gabrielle to come into her own with out being forced to serve another."

Apolline glanced at Marion. Fleur noticed. She also deduced her mother's stifled response. 'But she does serve another' or something to that effect.

"Gabrielle is as pure as any being alive, Maman. Right now she is exactly what she was always meant to be."

Fleur pushed her emotions out into the open, hoping to show that her heart had the same aims as her mother's did- only, each Delacour's protectiveness was focused on a different target. That one small step was all it took to change everything.

"I am in a position to protect Little Angel as you and Pappa have always protected me. I will do what needs to be done for Gabrielle," Fleur looked around herself, "even if that means working in a whorehouse to do it."

"Plate five done yet?" One of the new girls asked the other.

"Hold yer horses."

"Last sentence on plate four is only a fragment."

"Gimmie five more minutes."

"Kay."

Apolline looked over to Marion, quickly glancing at the two new girls and then back.

"Both are from Bryn Mawr College and yes both are Veela. Julie and Jessie here are pretty good with the classical and runic languages... but not French. Apparently they think Egyptian and Old Norse are sexier by far."

Having finally been brought into the conversation, the two American archeology students were finally formally introduced. This was good as it allowed the two Delacours to cool off a bit. The girls were sisters, daughters of a man who was a rather gifted linguist. Their mother chose him after being hit on in eighty-three languages in ten minutes. He even used period accurate come-on's in all of the the dead languages. Their mother reacted to his display of alpha nerd talent by sliding straight from her pole to his lap and riding him all the way to his hotel room. They were mated, married and expecting by the time he got back to his respectable collegiate professorial home. Sure, Mom's been called a fame seeking gold digging whore ever since but they're all Veela and that's par for the course. At least both girls got Dad's head for languages even if they prefer the dead ones to the live ones.

Apolline may not have fully vented, but she was willing to wait for a second round... and there was some interesting stuff sitting out on the table. The French Veela matron's eye grazed over the photos more and more often as her comfort level rose and Marion noticed.

"Interested in finding out how we spend our time here in the Garden?" Marion asked Apolline.

"These are from the temple, are they not?" Apolline answered.

"Zey are." Fleur spoke up.

Julie and Jessie both relaxed. The others were sticking with English. Looked like their boss was okay with them knowing what was going on with all these locals.

"Ze photographs you see before you show zee temple's records. Zey are from zee interior walls as well as what few scrolls 'ave been deemed safe to 'andle so far."

"Anything noteworthy?" Apolline asked.

"All of it!" Segolene exclaimed.

Apolline's eyebrow rose. Fleur elaborated.

"We 'ave already identified 'istories of Veela interaction wiz zee Greeks, zee Scyzians, and zee Romans... we have yet to identify zee Christians but it is only a matter of time." Fleur pulled a particular photo out of the stack and slid it over to her mother. "Best of all, we 'ave found Veela law."

The photo showed row after row after row of characters in Greek and Latin. There were also a large number of runes she didn't recognize, but then she was not an expert in that field and never had been.

"Law?" Apolline's interest rose again. "A criminal code?"

"No." Segolene jumped in. "Seems like ancient Veela were expected to follow local laws off the island. On the island you could always count on the angels to correct any naughtiness or so the records indicate."

Fleur retook the reigns. "We 'ave found zee regulations by which our temple was run. Which festivals to observe. Which angels to invoke. Zere is still much work to be done 'ere zough..."

Apolline watched curiously as her daughter's explanation tapered off. She didn't expect Julie to pick it up.

"This is where it get's hard."

The girl pushed over her own photo as proof. Row after row of runes. Runes Apolline didn't recognize even in the slightest.

"That," Julie explained, "is more Scythian text than any one researcher has ever seen one place in the history of modern archeology. We still don't know what most of it means."

"We'll figure it out though!" Jessie added eagerly. "Too bad we can't bring the old man into this. He'd cream his jeans over it. He's been looking for a Rosetta stone with Scythian rune sets for, like, ever."

"Yeah, we'll figure it out in no time. Count on it." Julie smiled confidently.

The young academic then turned to Marion. "So, you gonna tell her?"

"Tell her what?" Marion replied.

"The name!" Julie chirped.

"Oh!" Marion shouted. "Of course!"

Apolline, who had take a seat when being introduced to the sisters, looked on in confusion as Marion began quickly flipping through the available images until she found just the right one. She slid it before the French mother and poked her finger into a bit of Greek in the middle of a lot of Greek.

"We now know what the island and village connected to it were called." Marion announced confidently.

"Really?" Apolline asked, voice slightly higher than usual.

Marion nodded sharply. Julie happily nodded along with her.

"Now," Marion seemed to suffer a surge of uncertainty for a moment, "we don't have any proof that this was the first settlement to be named this... the myth could have been established first... but the correct translation into Ukrainian for a place name would be Edem."

Apolline paused. "Edem?"

"Eden!" Segolene shouted. "The spiritual home to a race of fallen angels was named Eden!"

The perky brunette leaned low over the table to get a little closer to Apolline and stage whispered, "There was supposed to be a fantastic garden... a real paradise according to the accounts."

"It's not something we can prove or disprove as of yet." Marion interrupted. "We'll have to wait for spring to hit before we can check soil conditions or look for hidden garden paths."

Marion took a quick glance over to her two protege's. "Metal detectors."

"Right." Julie answered before jotting down a quick note. "Ground penetrating radar if we can get one."

"Any idea how long it'll take for that lake to thaw?" Jessie asked.

"Not yet." Marion answered. "Ice is probably getting thin soon too."

"Damn." Jessie grunted.

Apolline sat back and watched as the five women worked together in a fairly well oiled team. She still wasn't completely happy with her daughter's choices but she could see that Fleur was not going to relent anytime soon. At least these were good people to have around. Fleur was associating with more Veela than she had during her school days and she was associating with very intelligent and well educated Veela at that.

And it cannot be stressed enough that Fleur – thank Jeanne – was not a whore.

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"Right." Harry grunted. "Time to get to work."

"I don't wanna..." Gabby whined.

The two of them were resting in a soft patch of grass in the forest glen just like the one which ushered the pair into the Hall of Angels so often. It wasn't the actual glen, though, just as they weren't in the actual Hall of Angels. Gabby was dreaming and tonight she was dreaming of the best ever night sky for stargazing while trying very hard not to learn something.

"You know how much it hurts me to do this," and because of the bond she did know, "but this is something that I can't teach 'Mione or your sister. And I can't do this myself. It has to be you."

Gabby pouted big time. Harry very much wanted to pout along with her. It was only a sense of urgency, a sense that Voldemort would do something on his death day, that spurred Harry on so. He wanted to be prepared- and since this was likely to be a spell battle and he couldn't cast magic, Gabby had to be prepared in his place.

Harry picked himself off the ground and sorted out his clothes. As Gabby hadn't made even a token attempt at following him, he

grasped her narrow wrist and pulled up. She rose quickly enough - not that she'd ever resist her Lord, of course.

"So," Harry prompted once he had her full attention. "Michael told me that the only thing you have to do with your wand is point at the target."

Gabby nodded dutifully. She was finally in school learning mode. She would learn what Harry had to teach her for the alternative was unthinkable. She would not disappoint her Lord.

"Imagine you are pointing your wand at the heart of... the target... and then you say the following words."

Harry breathed in. Gabby pointed her index finger out into the night sky like she was pointing a wand and listened closely.

"Nametta sule..." Harry lead.

"Nametta sule..." Gabby followed.

"...atalante firima." Harry finished the chant.

"...atalante firima." Gabby ended hers... with a slight waver in her voice.

Harry looked over to his Angel, the little girl he was teaching soul magic too for the express purpose of eliminating a Dark Lord. This was hard for both of them.

"Nametta sule atalante firima." Harry repeated.

"Nametta sule atalante firima." Gabby parroted flawlessly.

Harry watched silently as the nine year old girl dedicated this new spell to memory. She repeated the words. She repeated them silently with her eyes closed. Then she tilted her head tilted to one side.

"What do the words mean?" Gabby asked.

Harry smiled at the stars. He'd asked Michael the same thing back when she taught him the cantrip.

"I end the spirit of the downfallen mortal." Harry answered.

"Sounds like it would hurt..." Gabby muttered.

Harry could feel her fear. It wasn't the fear of having to cast the spell. It was fear of having it thrown back at her if she missed the first time.

"Him yes. You? No."

"Really?" Luminous blue eyes looked up with hope.

"Really." Harry added with a soft smile. "Michael knew you would wonder about that. Seems that while this spell is the right class of magic to affect you, the details are all wrong."

"Are you sure?"

"She told me what would have to change to hurt you. She felt I needed to know."

The two gazed at each other under the other-worldly starlight and full moon of their favorite magical classroom.

"She also told me that you need to know... if you ever hear these words you do anything you can to stop them." Harry added.

Gabby hesitantly nodded for him to continue.

"Naquelle sule avari maia." He studied her face as she absorbed his words. "It means 'I diminish the spirit of the unwilling maia.'"

Gabby squinted at that last bit. He didn't blame her.

"Sorry. I didn't think to ask what a maia was at the time. Must translate to angel or something."

Gabby spoke up. "What language is it?"

Harry's face pinked. "Didn't think to ask."

Gabby smiled. Harry couldn't help but smile to. Gabby snickered and Harry was forced to snicker as well. Then came the giggles. Harry, being too manly to giggle, chose to chuckle instead.

They didn't practice actually casting the spell. Her pronunciation was fine and there were no complicated wand movements. With so much at stake, intent would be easy to find. Besides, neither Harry nor Gabby wanted to see the spell itself before it was necessary. They didn't want to get used to it. They didn't want the spell to feel common or ordinary, for they dreaded the unnatural confrontation that would force them to depend on it.

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The Great Hall of Hogwarts could be a loud and boisterous place. Oh, that only really happened at scheduled meal times which left the balance of the day rather quiet, but this wasn't one of those inactive times. As lunch was in full swing there was a constant buzz in the air.

"Mum? Dad?" A surprised Gryffindor squeaked.

Eyebrows rose all around. A middle aged couple was indeed approaching the young lion.

"Neville!" His mother swooped in for a hug even before the boy could clear his seat.

"Good to see you, boy!" Frank Longbottom called to his son.

Neville was too wrapped up in his mother Alice's embrace to stop his father from running a hand through his short hair.

"B- but Healer Hulbert said-"

But Neville was interrupted by parents who were entirely too excited about seeing their boy again to worry about stuffy healers.

"I had a chat with Mum." Frank said. "She was quite insistent with Healer Hulbert. Hospitals are for sick people, not healthy ones."

Neville had a surprised yet happy look permanently stuck to his face.

"Your Gran really has a way with words... and with galleons... and with her wand too though you wouldn't think it to look at her..." Alice cooed into her son's ear.

A crowd was beginning to form. Most of them were well wishers who wanted to welcome the famous auror couple who had only recently been miraculously healed.

"Merciful heavens!" An old Scotswoman of a well wisher called. "If it isn't Frank and Alice. Welcome back to Hogwarts dears."

"Professor McGonagall!" Frank called, turning from his son. "It's so good to see you again!"

Not one person in the castle could remember ever seeing Minerva McGonagall tear up. The number was about to rise dramatically though. The school Headmistress made her way through the crowds to pull her wayward sheep home again.

"Professor McGonagall!" Alice called. "Where is the Headmaster?"

The noisy hall immediately began to go quiet, but Alice wasn't done asking questions.

"How about my godson Harry? Actually, I'd really like to thank Miss Granger for everything she did for me and Frank. Neville's got some wonderful friends here and I'd very much like to spend some time with them... that is if their class schedule will allow it."

Alice and Frank began to notice the crowd reaction to her questions. They were a bit uncomfortable about it to tell the truth. A pretty redhead went so far as to cover her mouth in shock.

Minerva steeled her resolve and answered the questions as best she could.

"Albus Dumbledore is no longer with us. His loss saddens us all."

"Oh, oh my!" Alice replied. "I'm sorry, I had no idea."

Minerva held firm and answered the next question, "Harry Potter is also... no longer with us."

"What?" Alice cried as her husband hissed next to her. "But- but how?"

"Harry was entered against his will in the Triwizard Tournament last year. He died saving a little girl's life in the Second Task. It was a little girl he didn't even have to risk himself for and he did it anyway." Ron answered.

Ron may not have always been the most loyal of friends, but he was damn proud of his best mate and always would be.

Alice and Frank both collapsed onto the Gryffindor Table benches, unable to fully come to grips with the twin death notices that somehow never made it into their recovery talks in St. Mungo's. It was Neville's turn to hold his mother tightly.

Minerva tried to restart things, "As for Miss Granger-"

"You bloody well better not be telling us she's dead too, we just seen her alive not one week ago!" Frank grumbled.

"Language, Frank!" Both Alice and the Headmistress called at the same time.

"Son," Frank called to the nearest person not crying. "Where is Hermione? Is she late for lunch?"

Neville looked between his parents. Even sobbing as she was, his Mum was still listening. "No Dad. She's at Beauxbatons in France. She ran off with Harry but they come back to visit some times."

Frank crinkled his brow. "You're not making sense, son. They just said Harry was dead. Come to think of it, you told us Hermione was Harry's girlfriend back when we were in the hospital... now I know I haven't worked a case in years but something doesn't add up. Care to try that again?"

Nev took a breath in before dropping the next bombshell, "Harry came back as a ghost on the night of the Third Task." Alice gasped. "He and Hermione declared their undying love for each other and left for France that night."

"But... then... how – or rather why did she go to St. Mungo's with you to heal us?" Frank asked his boy.

Minerva tried to answer. "But you weren't healed by any student witch. You were healed by the Angel Gabrielle. Gabrielle Delacour is the very girl Harry saved in the Second Task and... well... there is so much more to tell you about her but it can wait for later."

Alice stared crossly at the Headmistress through her tears, "I may think the girl that helped my Neville bring us back to the world is an angel but I know for a fact her name is Hermione Granger and she is Harry Potter's girlfriend. She said so herself. She seemed to be an extraordinary young woman. Not that I want to take her away from my godson but Miss Granger is exactly the kind of witch I'd like to see my Nevie bring home one day."

Neville became the center of attention. His Headmistress obviously wanted answers as did his mum and dad. A select group of students in the immediate vicinity knew the answer and Nev could tell that Gin and the others were quite keen to see him answer this one. It had the potential to be epic.

Unconsciously, Neville began to rub the scabbed over rune that was still visible on his palm if one knew where to look.

"Well, you see..." Neville coughed.

He asked himself what Hermione would do. He asked himself what Harry would want. He summoned all his Gryffindor courage. He spoke.

"Hermione and Gabby and I all went to St. Mungo's together." A lot of eyebrows were rising. "Harry had given his mum's research journal to Hermione 'cause he knew she was the type to really be able to get something out of it... and she did. It was Harry's mum's research that showed Hermione how to heal Mum and Dad. She knew it would work."

Nev had a captive audience. He had even drawn a crowd from the other tables.

"S – so 'Mione had me help her with you two while Gabby played with Professor Lockheart a few beds down." More eyebrows rose.

"Only, I guess a Healer showed up and Gabby didn't want the Healer to interfere with what 'Mione and I were doing so she went angel on us and distracted the hospital staff by healing anything that moved."

Even Ron and Ginny were impressed. They had heard Harry's second hand account of Hermione's report but Harry was pretty vague and his story lacked that kick of an eye witness.

"Gabby healed a lot of people that day. I won't take that away from her. But Hermione was an angel of mercy that day for me. You can't take that away from her either."

Minerva had a question for her brave young lion. "Would you mind explaining what magic she used to wake your parents from their slumber, Mister Longbottom?"

Neville instinctively pulled his hand back around his body to cover the evidence of blood magic.

Someone unfortunate noticed.

"Something wrong with your hand, Longbottom?" Draco Malfoy drawled.

The white-blond Slytherin prince snagged Nev's wrist and took a closer look.

"That's a rune. How ever did you get a rune cut into your palm Longbottom?" Draco spoke loud enough for his voice to carry. They had an audience now.

"And by the looks of it, I'd say this cut is a few days... maybe a week old. Or am I mistaken?"

Ginny was glaring fiery death at Draco from spitting distance. If only they were alone...

"What is this about a rune, Mister Longbottom?" Headmistress McGonagall was drawing herself up to deal with a possible situation.

Nev chose to stand tall. He held his palm up for the Headmistress and both his auror parents to see.

"Yesss," Neville ground out, "she cut my palm. And yes we used a blood magic ritual to bring back my mum and my dad and I'm not apologizing for it!"

There were some gasps at his declaration.

"Mione is a muggleborn and one of the lightest light witches alive. She learned how to do this from Lilly Potter, another muggleborn and one of the lightest light witches ever! If you think I'm going to think ill of her or if you think I'm going to think ill of the magic used to bring my parents back – the magic used to kill You Know Who the first time - then you can bloody well think again!"

"Language!" Alice yelled in a knee-jerk reaction.

Neville lowered his eyes a bit but he refused to drop his head. "Sorry, Mum."

Alice leapt from her seat, grabbed her son's cut palm and then his shoulder and pulled him in close. She was shocked and amazed and frightened and proud and everything all at the same time. It was just too much.

Once things began to settle down. Headmistress McGonagall offered a room to the Longbottoms for a few nights so that they could be closer to their son. Frank and Alice accepted immediately. There would have to be an official inquiry into the hospital incident, one which Minerva would have to speak to Amelia about. And Alain Delacour. And the Grangers of course.

And just when she had hopes of everything beginning to settle down, too.

-o\0/o-

"Draco! Wait!"

The young Lord Malfoy stopped in the middle of a hallway. They were alone, otherwise the elder Greengrass daughter would never have shouted as she did.

He stood there glaring at the stone tile beneath his shoes and listened as she rushed up to him. A soft hand came down on his shoulder. He did not turn.

"Draco? What was that? What were you doing with Longbottom?" Daphne asked.

Draco sneered into empty space.

"Please. Things clearly aren't going according to plan. I can help you- I want to help you. Just... tell me what's going on?" Daphne didn't sound like the Ice Princess of Slytherin House, not that she had since the castle was stormed by dementors and dark wizards. And Voldemort. The ice had been thoroughly shaken free due to all the violence of that night.

Draco started off mumbling though he got louder, "They'll get their just desserts... I could have shown Potter the way but nooooo, Scarhead just had to push forward his own way well let's see what backing that mudblood whore gets him now!"

"Draco!" Daphne shouted, trying to pull him into her embrace from behind.

The young pureblood Lord took a quick step away from his recent conquest.

"Go back to your sister, Greengrass." Draco returned coldly. "Find someone that cares about your useless prattle."

He began to walk away.

He didn't see the heartbroken young witch collapse into herself as confusion and pain and betrayal and rage all battled for control of her face.

He also didn't see the furious redheaded spitfire step out from her cover nearby to unleash a brace of painful hexes and curses at his back. He barely had time to turn into the first body-bind before all that magic began turning his world dark with pain. With a fire in her eyes and a spell chain on her lips, Ginny took Draco apart.

"Thanks for leading me to him." The redhead consoled the shaking blonde. "I think I got him good enough for the both of us, but if you disagree he should be pretty easy to hex for a good while longer."

Daphne sat there, immobile due to her own torments, and watched the youngest Weasley saunter off down the corridor. It took her ten minutes to move enough to see to her own needs. Perhaps after she was set to rights she might tell someone about Draco... if they hadn't already found him by then.

-o\0/o-

R-r-r-r-r-ing... R-r-r-r-r-ing... R-r-r-r-r-ing... slap! R-r-r-r-r-ing... R-r-r-r-r-ing...

"That isn't the alarm." Segolene groaned into her lover's hair. "It's the phone."

"I thought we didn't have any appointments until one at the earliest today..." A mussed up yet still sexy Fleur murmured as she squinted her eyes at the nearest clock. Quarter to seven. Damn, that was too early.

"Well, it sto-" R-r-r-r-r-ing... R-r-r-r-r-ing...

Segolene cursed.

Fleur picked up the phone. "Yes?"

"Good morning, Daisy!" An annoyingly eager voice came over the line.

"Julie. 'ow many times do I 'ave to tell you my name is Fleur?" Fleur grunted. She wasn't quite ready to be awake and speak English yet.

"Yeah, well Fleur means flower. I looked it up and everything. 'Flower' is much too general so I picked one and you're Daisy now isn't that great? So Marion told me to tell you that you and Seggy should come see us this morning. I think we're done."

Fleur hated Julie and her tendency to give everyone stupid nickn – hold on. What was that bit at the end?

"Come again?" Fleur said with a little more energy.

There was a sigh over the line. "We're done, hun. The Veela Book of Law version one point oh has been compiled and awaits your perusal."

That got Fleur's blood pumping. "And selecting zee priestesses?"

"Chapter seven as we see it. Not that it came in chapters but version oh point one was literally chiseled into a stone wall and we're putting it on paper and binding it and everything. Index is kinda short; we're gonna have to work on that."

"We'll be zere in an 'our?" Fleur offered.

"Great! I've still got time to get some dinner then. No, breakfast. Crap, I need to go to bed soon." The line went dead.

Fleur looked at the receiver for a moment before putting it down. She looked over to Segolene.

"I hate Americans."

Segolene giggled. Ten seconds and a kiss later, both young witches were out of bed and starting their morning routines.

...

Forty-five minutes after their unexpected wake-up call Fleur and Segolene met again with Marion, Julie and Jessie in a business conference room in the Garden. They were mere hours short of the two week anniversary of their first meeting in this room, the same meeting Apolline stepped into uninvited. Apolline had come back several times since then. She was always greeted politely and treated with respect but she always returned to her house alone.

Fleur wasn't sure she'd be going back, not long term at any rate.

"Good morning." Fleur called out. Her greeting was returned all around.

"So Marion," Fleur started, "Julie tells me you 'ave somezing?"

Marion smiled and pushed a simple three ring binder across the desk. Fleur caught it and opened it up.

"Oh, nice..." Segolene chirped. "It's got pictures like a children's book!"

"My idea!" Jessie crowed. "We noticed that each 'chapter' had a wall frieze that was associated with it... and of course we used a 'left page Original, right page English' format so that anyone can challenge our translations if they want to..."

"And how many people out there can challenge your translations?" Segolene asked as she leaned in to squint at the runes in question. "I can't make heads or tails of this."

Julie smiled brightly. Far more brightly than one who never went to sleep last night should be able to smile for sure.

"You want me to include those in this room in the total?"

Fleur and Segolene looked at each other, they nodded together.

"Three!" Julie was unnaturally smug. She was probably mentally patting herself on the back. "These are Scythian runes remember? Super rare and stuff? It was a bitch, but we cracked the code anyway."

Fleur wasn't looking up anymore. She was reading. Chapter seven. The life and rituals of priestesses. Segolene read the same selection from over Fleur's shoulder. When it was clear that Fleur was too busy reading to talk, Marion sent the sisters back to their rooms for good night's – er, day's rest.

Half an hour later, Fleur had read chapter seven as well as parts of three other chapters just to be sure. Then she slowly closed the book and stared at it. Glared at it, really.

"It's not the end of the world." Segolene comforted while silently waving Marion out of the room.

"I will need to speak with Maman about this." Fleur murmured.

"Of course we will," Segolene comforted, "but we should try Nathalie first, don't you think?"

Fleur looked at the love of her life. Yes. She nodded. That might be a good idea.

...

An hour later, Fleur and Segolene were both sitting in front of Nathalie's desk in her private office. Nathalie was laughing her perfect arse off.

"It isn't funny." Fleur forced out. "How can I watch over Gabrielle if I can't be the first Head Priestess of the new Veela temple? By Jeanne I don't even qualify as a simple acolyte."

"Virgin priestesses?" Snicker. "Virgin Veeeeela priestesses? Really? I was sure you were going to find some law about sex based worship and High Prostitutes or something..."

Nathalie laughed some more.

"I don't see how you find this amusing." Fleur said. "I had hoped that the messages Edem had to offer would give me a way to protect Little Angel but all I get is 'virgins only'."

"Well..." Nathalie snickered. "You should look on the bright side."

"What bright side?" Segolene asked in defense of her hurting love.

"Maybe you have forgotten, but the Grand Matron's Council is a 'no virgins allowed' kind of club. They can't run the show either." Nathalie's voice steadied. "And you said that, so far as the island goes, an angel's word is law. Literally. The way I see it, you have a golden ticket should you make the effort to turn it in."

"But where do you look for virgin Veela?" Segolene wondered aloud. "The priestesses will have to come from somewhere..."

"How long did you last in Beauxbatons, Fleur?" Nathalie asked.

"Fourteen." Fleur answered immediately.

"You waited longer than most from what I can tell." Nathalie said softly. "Of course, not all Veela have a choice..." Nathalie shook herself. "Anyways, secondary schooling is your best bet. You can bet that our first crop of priestesses will be between twelve and fourteen years old... maybe fifteen at the very most."

"And as they grow older we can expect most of them to drop out in their early twenties... shouldn't have any reach thirty I expect." Fleur said clinically.

"Oh really? Why do you say that?" The pregnant madam asked.

Fleur idly pointed down at the book. "Chapter seven. A priestess exists to serve the temple... until Veela nature overpowers her spiritual devotion."

Nathalie seemed not to get it.

"The instinct to mate. Priestesses are dedicated to a life of purity - but only until they feel a need to leave the temple behind them and bear children. Motherhood is natural and accepted according to the Law, even for those who gave themselves to the temple."

Nathalie snorted. "Sounds like being a priestess in the traditional role wouldn't be any fun. It's probably for the best you can't be one. Still... the Grand Matrons can't do it either and you are still the undisputed master of Veela history and law. Who's going to teach the first batch of holy virgins if you don't? Hand them off to Gabby and she'll have an island wide game of hide-and-seek running before you can say angel."

Visualizing Gabby among her holy piers, Fleur smiled for the first time in hours. "And if she wants to do exactly that? I for one won't stop her. It could even be fun."

Maybe it wasn't so bad, Fleur thought. Her recent dreams of running Edem on behalf of her sister was dead, but only if you considered Edem the island. There was still the settlement of Edem on the lake's shore. Fleur had the time, the knowledge and the desire to make something of herself... to make something of Edem. She would succeed.

She would make her mother proud.

Maman. Fleur wanted to speak to her mother again. Maybe after she presented the new book of Veela law to the Grand Matrons. Maybe after she and Segolene provided a plan for recruiting new priestesses. After all, since that fateful first trip across Europe into Ukraine, Fleur has met dozens of little Veela that may be viable candidates... and Madam Ewing sounds approachable as an American contact...

Fleur would return to her father's house with her head held high. Maman would welcome her with open arms and say 'Welcome home, Little Princess'. Fleur would complain loudly about the childhood nickname, but she would still be glad to be home. And Segolene would be smart enough not to tease Fleur about still thinking of her parent's house as her home.

Maybe she could approach her mother again before the ceremony at Hogwarts. It was only one week away, after all. She would be expected to appear with her family. It would be best if they were reconciled before appearing before the crowds.

Fleur pulled herself together and began planning out her day. She really had to get with Marion and Nathalie and schedule a meeting with the Grand Matrons. She had a plan to draw up and a presentation to work on.

-o\0/o-

"I'm hooooome!" A small light blue form shot out of green flames.

Aimee Devereux brushed the soot off her robes and listened for her parent's response. There wasn't one. All she heard was the wizarding wireless set in the parlor. Weird.

Oh, well.

Aimee ran up the stairs from her home's front foyer and shed all of her unnecessary school things. The book bag thumped onto the floor first. Then her hat hit the bed followed by her short cape and jacket. She kicked off her shoes last before jumping up and tearing down the stairs looking for a snack. Amiee got herself a soda and a bag of dried fruit before heading to the parlor to see if she really was alone in the house.

Sadly, she wasn't.

"Popa?" Aimee asked as she entered the room.

Her Poppa was there but he was lying motionless at an odd angle on the settee. Then she saw motion out of the corner of her eye.

Aimee dropped her drink and snack at the sight of her mother writhing in silenced pain on the floor.

"Maman!"

She took a step forward only to feel her legs turn to jelly under her as she tumbled to the ground.

"Maman!" Aimee struggled in growing horror as she looked up to see her mother's eyes had rolled back and blood was dripping out of her mouth.

"Oh, dear me..." A disturbingly happy voice came from the corner behind her. "Is the widdle biddy baby sad? Is she gonna cwy?"

Aimee knew it was English but she wasn't sure what the woman was saying. With tears beginning to pour down her cheeks, she looked behind her.

"Why, she is! She is gonna cwy!" A crazed looking woman with dark wild hair and a tattered black dress cackled. "Your best friend is an angel, isn't she? Well? Where is she now? Will she come to make it all better? Will she kiss the ouchies away? Where is your little angel friend now?"

"Stop it! Pleeease stop hurting my Maman!" Aimee wailed.

The woman's cackles became a shriek. "Children should be seen, not heard! Oh well, spare the wand spoil the child!"

Through blurry eyes, Aimee watched as the mad witch turned a glowing wand from Maman to herself. Then there was a light. Then came the pain. Soon she couldn't think of Maman through her own agony, not that anyone else could hear now that she'd been silenced like her Maman.

To poor Aimee the pain seemed to last forever before darkness and peace finally claimed her.

End Chapter

Chapter Notes:

Please note that no adorable little girls were harmed in the making of this chapter. And I would never kill off a little girl in one of my stories... well maybe I would - but not Aimee. That would make Gabby sad (okay, okay... that would make me sad) and I can't have that.

For the new spell language Harry and Gabby are dabbling in, ten house points to anyone who correctly identified it as Quenya, one of the primary languages of elves in J.R.R. Tolkien's work. Granted, I probably got the grammar and sentence structure wrong but then I'm not that much of a nerd that I would learn how to speak an imaginary language. More to the point of using Quenya: 'Why' You ask? First, it's a pretty enough language for spell crafting. Second (and I'm pretty sure I covered this in an Chapter Note long before, but just in case I didn't) I'll say that I think of Tolkien's work as a deep back history and crossover for my story. The first angels were maiar and Gabby has ascended to become a new maia. For those still reading this note who don't know what the maiar were, you could consider them powerful nature spirits or lesser gods/goddesses.

Chapter Twenty-nine: Blood and Tears

Aimee Devereux woke up.

Today of all days, she wanted to just go back to sleep and allow her dreams to carry her away from the waking world. Why, even a nightmare about being late for a big exam would be preferable to the real school day ahead of her. It was Friday, the last day before she was supposed to go to England with her very best friends Gigi and Gabby. It was supposed to be the best thing ever... until yesterday.

A tear fell down her cheek in open defiance of the wonderful morning sun creeping through her bedroom window.

Aimee got ready for school much as she usually did though her self-made bowl of cereal did not match what her mother made every morning before... before...

More tears fell from bloodshot eyes.

"Why so sad, widdle girl?" A smug voice called from behind her.

After a brief struggle with her emotions, Aimee replied, "I can't understand what you are saying."

There was a short pause. Aimee feared that she may have set the crazed English woman off again and she cringed in anticipation of her punishment. The woman behind her didn't curse her this time. Instead, she murmured something too soft for Aimee to understand.

"You understand me now, don't you, you little bitch?" Bellatrix called.

Must have been a spell then. Aimee shuddered and nodded.

"Good." Bella continued. "Because if you can't follow simple instructions then I might have to punish... your mother."

"I'll be good." Aimee moaned, head down.

Bellatrix stared hard at the girl before moving away to do whatever it was that evil demon women did. Aimee wasn't hungry anymore. She pushed the untouched bowl of cereal away and finished getting

ready for school. Some twenty minutes later, the sad young witch moved in front of the fireplace.

"You know what you must do if you want your mother and father to live, don't you little bitch?" Bellatrix called just as Aimee was reaching for the floo powder.

Aimee nodded.

Bellatrix's next words were whispered into the little girl's ear, much to her discomfort.

"Use this just as I told you to use it." Bella said.

Aimee felt Bellatrix place a cold rough object into her hand.

"Do this for me and I promise that your mother and father will be left alone. You and your worthless little family will get to live in peace... but if you fail..."

A single unkempt fingernail drew a painful line across Aimee's neck.

"You, your mother, your father, all your relatives. Every last one of them dies."

Aimee bit back a cry. This woman didn't take well to her crying last night. It was a painful lesson.

"I'll be good." Aimee whispered.

"But I don't want you to be 'good' do I?" Bellatrix cooed. "I want you to be bad. Very bad."

Aimee fought through her shakes to nod again.

"Now off to school, little bitch." Bella said while giving the girl a light push towards the floo. "You have a big day ahead of you. A very big day."

A frightened Aimee slid the item Bellatrix gave her into her satchel. She then threw some floo powder into the fireplace and called out her school's name. She jumped in.

Bellatrix stood still for a moment, staring into the flames. Then she pulled her left hand back from behind her back and uncrossed her fingers.

With a sadistic smile, she drew her wand and went upstairs to have a few words with Aimee's parents.

A few last words.

-o\0/o-

A lone figure popped into view before gilded floral gates.

"Tell my mother I wish to speak to her." Fleur Delacour announced formally.

The gates swung silently open and she walked up the stone lined drive in silence.

It took ten minutes for Fleur to walk from the front gates of her family's property to the main doors of the Delacour ancestral maison-forte. She intended for the walk to settle her nerves while rattling those of her mother, yet she wasn't feeling all that settled. The picturesque drive did not sooth her anxiety. The smooth lake did not slow her beating heart nor did the beautiful tropical birds in residence bring her spirit peace. Something else then to keep her mind off things.

Fleur distracted herself by pulling the newly printed copies of Veela law and history out of her pocket and resizing them. They were to be gifts for her mother: a peace offering. She expected them to work well as the Grand Matron's Council was well pleased when she met with them two days prior. It helped that she had not only translations for the walls of the temple at Edem but also a compilation of every story and bit of folklore taught to her from all the Veela groups she met during her travels. Such a book had never been published before which meant that Fleur effectively just wrote the first Veela Bible. Granted, she would lavish praise upon Segolene for her help and support and Marion, Julie and Jessie were all noted for their hard work, but really this was Fleur's baby from start to finish. Future generations of Veela would remember that fact. Segolene and Marion had already joked about naming the combined works the Flower Codex and the two American sisters continued to insist

everything be named the Gospel of Daisy. Fleur shot that idea down out of hand. The Flower Codex... well... she kind of liked that name to tell the truth...

Her childhood home's massive entry doors opened as a nervous Fleur approached them. An equally nervous Apolline appeared standing in the entrance hall. Fleur stopped just inside the doors.

"Maman." She started. "Here is the fruit of my labor, the reason I have spent so much time away from family."

Fleur broke eye contact and looked down at the books in her hand.

"Here is both our past and our future, Maman. With these we can-"

But Fleur was unable to continue her report. Apolline closed the distance, latched onto her Little Princess and began to tear up. The books were ignored, their existence reduced to a collection of paper sheets sandwiched between a Veela mother and her daughter.

"You came home." Apolline sniffled out.

"I did." Fleur answered, face flush with emotion.

-o\0/o-

- Fwoosh -

Aimee hopped out of the floo and wiped the last few tears off her face. She ignored the soot clinging to her uniform even though complaining about it was usually one of her favorite morning traditions. Were it not for the automatic cleaning ward in the Joliebatons floo lobby, she would have walked to class dirty this time.

"Aimee!" Gigi greeted her in the hall. "Hey, what's wrong?"

Not that anything was right, but Aimee was close to panicking from the question.

"Uhhmmnnnn..."

"You don't look so good." Curly blonde locks dipped closer. "Have you been crying?"

"I -" Aimee mentally recoiled. "I don't feel too good. I was sick last night."

Concern filled Gigi's delicate features. "Why don't you go back home. I'll tell Professor Royal that you're too sick to go to class today."

"No!" Aimee panicked thinking about her family and their fate should she not do as she was told. "I mean, I feel better... I can't... I can go to class."

Aimee tried to force a smile. Gigi wasn't impressed.

"I feel lots better! Really!" Aimee forced out. "Let's go to class..."

The too pale girl with bloodshot eyes turned and marched off not even waiting for her friend to catch up. Maybe if she didn't look anyone in the eye it wouldn't hurt so bad.

It only took a minute for the two girls to reach their classroom. Gabby drifted into class five minutes later and sat between her two friends as she usually did.

"Gigi. Aimee- hey! You don't look so good." Gabby's silver-blond crowned head dipped closer for a better look. "Have you been crying?"

"That's what I asked too." Gigi commented.

Aimee didn't dare look Gabby in the eyes. She knew she wouldn't be able to do what she was told to do if she looked Gabby in the eyes. Her maman and papa would be slaughtered by a crazy dark witch if she failed but if she looked at Gabby even once she knew she wouldn't be able to go through with it.

"Aimee?" Gabby asked.

Aimee began to shake. It was just too hard. Her eyebrows crinkled and her eyes became wet.

"Miss Devereux." Their teacher's voice shocked Aimee into motion. She looked up to the front desk. "Aimee, sweetheart, is there something I can do for you?"

Professor Royal could stop her. She was a teacher and she was a grown-up and she could stop Aimee if given a chance... if Aimee didn't do what she was supposed to do... Aimee's face went pale as fear flooded her whole body. More and more of her classmates were turning to look at her. Gigi and Gabby both got closer so they could better look after their friend's health.

"Are you going to be sick?" Gabby asked. "I'll take you to the Healer..."

Aimee felt the walls closing in on her. Her family would die. They would all die and it would be her fault. One shaking hand dipped into her satchel and grasped a hidden item.

"I'm sorry!" Aimee yelled much to the shock and surprise of everyone watching. "I'm so sorry!"

Aimee acted in blind panic. She used her left hand to hold Gabby's arm down on her desk and pulled an obsidian dagger up in the air for all to see.

Gabby had just enough time to breathe in before Aimee drove the stone dagger into her forearm. Aimee's panic fueled attack was strong enough to leave a small obsidian chip stuck in Gabby's radius bone where the blade bounced off. Gabby's shriek of pain could be heard up and down the hallway by every student in two grade levels. Half a second later, almost every other girl in class began screaming along with her.

Professor Royal snatched up her wand and took aim at the two girls before freezing in her own panic. What should she do? What spell? Freeze the girls or summon the weapon? She had never been trained in how to handle a situation like this!

She would end up being too late, just like the two boys that both moved to break up the horribly bloody fight were too late to help as well. Gabby's blood quickly coated the blade and splashed over Aimee's hand. A small red river began flowing down Gabby's sloped writing desk.

The bloody obsidian blade glowed blue for a moment before disappearing. It took Gabby and Aimee with it.

A portkey.

-o\0/o-

Breakfast was being served in Beauxbatons.

Today was a little different as the French school's two English transfer students were entertaining a guest before class this morning, and as guests go this one was quite unusual. Hermione Granger and Luna Lovegood-Granger were discussing things over crepes and fruit with Harry Potter. As Harry Potter was a ghost, this drew a lot of attention from the other students. Most of the wizards and witches in hearing range were listening in to the girls' conversation with a ghost even if they were being sneaky about it.

"It just isn't fair sister dear," Luna teased, "I know he's dead and everything but that doesn't change the fact that you and Harry spent all last night in bed together."

Hermione's face went red as a few of the other girls and boys nearby turned to look at them. A boy and girl caught in bed together? How wonderfully scandalous!

Harry tried to save his stricken love.

"I wasn't 'in bed' with her. I was in her dreams. That was how I managed to bypass school wards in the first place... ghosts can't just cross the ward line without help, they need a way in." Harry waved his hands in a crossing the ward line kind of motion.

A nearby witch couldn't resist butting in. "You were in her dreams? Don't you mean you were in her fantasies? Did you have to clean your bed sheets this morning, Hermione?"

Several other girls giggled at the light hearted taunt. As Hermione turned an even deeper shade of red, it was safe to say that Harry's attempt to save his love failed. Perhaps he wasn't the knight in shining armor in social situations that he was in angry monster situations.

"Now, as I was saying earlier," Hermione squeaked while attempting to force a topic change. "Luna and I will have to be ready for the

auror escort by seven tomorrow morning if we want to make it through all the security checks that will be in place for our trip to Scotland."

Harry was about to put his foot in his mouth again when he suddenly tensed and turned to look at some unnamed distant thing.

"Harry?" Hermione asked.

"No. no no no no no no..." Harry muttered to himself for a moment before his eyes went wide and he turned even more pale than usual. "No!"

"Harry?" Hermione shouted.

He looked at his 'Mione for a moment before saying two words.

"Gabby. Portkey."

Harry vanished.

"Harry!" Hermione shouted at empty space.

The young witch's face went ashen, a trick that Luna's face seemed to imitate a second later. All around them, other confused and alarmed students began to badger Hermione and Luna about what just happened. Hermione's answer was to turn to the professor's table and yell for her Headmistress.

-o\0/o-

Gabby's portkey ride was extremely unpleasant. Not only was she being flung about by raw magic hooked into her belly but she still had a stone dagger stuck in her arm. Harry was trying to send her reassuring thoughts but the impaled arm thing was giving him flashbacks of the Chamber of Secrets. That damned basilisk fang hurt like a bitch when he was twelve and he was sure this dagger was hurting her about the same.

Aimee going crazy and coming along for the ride was not helping.

- Thump -

And then the ride was over.

The part of Gabby that wasn't screaming was trying to look around. She had just enough time to register the dimly lit room with a dirty wooden floor before the dagger was roughly yanked out of her arm.

She looked down at her blood soaked arm and screamed again. Losing the dagger actually hurt more than catching it in the first place.

Before any kind of rational thought could cross the young witch's mind, heavy conjured ropes wrapped themselves tightly around her pinning her arms down to her waist. There may not be a dagger in her arm anymore but having an open wound smashed by rope hurt pretty bad too. She fell against a stone desk or altar or something; there was something else on top of it but she really couldn't see too well in the dim light.

"I'm sorry I'm sorry I'm sorry!" Aimee wailed.

"Shut your mouth!" Yelled an older witch.

Gabby fought against the pain to wriggle around and look at her front stabbing best friend. She turned just quick enough to see Aimee magically thrown against a wall and stuck there as if bound by invisible chains. Aimee didn't stop crying but then Gabby was well past the point of having any kind of self control as well. They were both scared to death and things didn't seem to be getting any better anytime soon.

"Excellent work, Bella..." A disturbingly familiar voice echoed through the darkness. "It seems I have at least one follower worth keeping."

"Cissy's husband was not worthy of serving you, Master" Bellatrix said demurely, "I'm glad the fool is dead."

Inside of Gabby, all of Harry's attempts at soothing the girl stopped. He was here. Voldemort.

"Voldemort!" Harry yelled just as he came free of Gabby's body. Harry wanted nothing more than to settle things ghost to ghost right there right then.

Harry's vision spun wildly and not because he was searching for his foe. Something was pulling on him. He tried to resist the force but whatever it was pulled him away from Gabby, not that her hands were free to reach for him.

"Bloody hell!" Harry shouted in frustration.

A dark shadow emerged from the depths of the room and began to chuckle. Bella's giggles joined her master's mirth and the two celebrated a plan gone horribly right.

"Ah, Harry Potter," The dark shade called, "so nice to see you accepted my invitation."

Harry pushed and strained for all his spectral form was worth but he was unable to escape his invisible prison. He couldn't rise to ceiling height nor could he drop below the floor, and when he did look at the floor beneath him...

"You see, Potter? You have nowhere to run, no Headmaster to hide behind, no all powerful child ready to destroy your enemies this time." Voldemort ghosted over to stare at Harry eye to eye. "You see that? You see what lies at your feet?"

Harry did see. It was a softly glowing orange pentagram inscribed inside of a perfect circle. Runes glowed out from between the star shape's lines. This magic circle was holding Harry in place.

"It is a most wonderful trap if I do say so myself..." Voldemort slowly drifted around Harry and his prison. "It's no ordinary magic. Not at all... and I have you to thank for the idea."

Harry looked defiant. Still, he was confused and the Dark Lord knew it.

Voldemort continued. "Blood magic, Potter. Blood magic. I thought you should see what your secret forbidden power is really capable of. The dagger, for example..."

Voldemort swung out a hand as though he were making a presentation, and in a way he was. Tom Riddle never would have been able to win over the pureblood elite of Britain were it not for his

winning personality and stagecraft. Like a television hostess Bellatrix proudly held the obsidian dagger aloft, the edges of which were still slick with Gabrielle's blood.

"It is my own creation." The Dark Lord said. "The French school your 'Little Angel' attends had wards which could detect dark artifacts and disable portkeys of course – but then their protections were easy to bypass by someone of my caliber. The dagger was magically inert until young Gabrielle's blood filled its rune etched faces. Her blood carried her own magic into the runes and activated the portkey... and it couldn't have been just any witch's blood to breach the wards, of course, but then we all know this little girl has power enough to make such a task seem like child's play."

"Let Gabby go!" Harry yelled.

Voldemort only laughed again. "Oh I will! I will! Once I have finished our business here I will release her into the world to do my bidding, to crush any and all who would defy me."

"Arsehole!" Harry shouted throwing himself against the magical cage holding him in place. It did no good.

"But I haven't explained the circle, have I? How thoughtless of me..." The dark bastard was clearly enjoying his victory as Harry struggled vainly and two girls continued to cry in pain and in fear. "You see, the circle below you is another fine example of blood magic. The line work is some of Bella's better work, I must say-"

Bella preened in the background.

"And the blood itself was rather generously donated by your Aunt Petunia."

That made Harry stop struggling. Petunia's blood? He couldn't help but look down into the softly glowing pattern beneath him. The line work was oddly graceful; Harry half expected a magic circle drawn in blood to look more aggressive.

"That's why Bella had to fetch your aunt from that pathetic shelter you called home for ten years. I needed family blood to guarantee the summoning circle would hold you, troublesome as you are." The

shade continued. "But alas, you have now officially overstayed your welcome, Harry Potter. I want you out of my house."

Harry felt helpless, angry and more than a little fearful. In fact, he hadn't felt this bad since Bern. Through their sniffles and moans, both girls heard the dark specter's taunts and despaired.

"Bella?" The spirit of Tom Riddle commanded. "Now."

"Yes, My Lord!"

A wand of darkly stained walnut and dragon heartstring core came to attention. Three rough guttural words left the witch's mouth and a muddy yellow bolt of magic crossed the short distance between her and the glowing circle under Harry. The glowing orange pattern flared brightly with the new magic, changing its purpose from holding Harry in place to getting rid of him with extreme prejudice.

Harry Potter's spirit was ripped from the world of the living and thrown elsewhere.

Gabrielle Delacour's scream matched her best efforts from the Second Task aftermath.

-o\0/o-

As soon as Harry landed, he sprung back up and spun about looking for threats.

There didn't seem to be any. All he saw was grass, an endless sea of long flowing grass on gently rolling hills. A bit of wind picked up and blew gentle waves through the sweet smelling fields. Harry felt himself calming down quickly as the peaceful setting struck a chord within his heart.

The Sun seemed to hang low on the horizon in one direction. Very low, in fact. He'd been here before. One of Hermione's ancient myths books told him these were the Elysian Fields and this was where he last saw-

"Harry!" A young woman's voice chirped just behind him.

He turned to identify his welcoming party. He knew this woman. Quite well in fact.

"Bloody hell!" Harry yelled, a deep scowl marring his face.

-Slap-

"Language, Harry!" The woman screeched after she popped him one in the face.

"Jeanne?" Harry blurted.

"No hugs, Harry? No 'how have you been, Jeanne?'" She returned.

"I can't be here. Gabby needs me... bloody Voldemort managed to get rid of me!" Harry massaged his temples in frustration. "Fuck!"

-SLAP-

"Do not say such things in my presence!" Jeanne shouted while reloading her slapping arm.

Harry flinched back and tried desperately to control the anger boiling up through his being. This was bad. This was very, very bad.

-o\0/o-

"A secure floo line has been established." A positively ancient looking witch in conservative robes turned from the runic control boards in the old Floo Network Authority office.

"Thank you Madam Marchbanks." Amelia Bones replied. "I had no idea you used to work in Magical Transportation."

The elder witch snorted softly. "It was my first job out of Hogwarts. If not for a scandalous encounter with the headstrong and virile Alexander Romanov, I would have stayed in that office. Baba Yaga may have suggested I end the relationship should I wish to keep my soul intact."

"Well..." Amelia didn't quite know how to respond to that. "I suppose Russia's loss is our gain, then."

Before Amelia could re-center herself and continue on with business, the secure floo burst into life.

- Fwoosh - - Fwoosh - - Fwoosh -

A pair of French aurors came through followed by Alain Delacour.

"Give me some good news, Amelia." Alain demanded.

Amelia ignored his lack of manners and answered the concerned parent.

"ICW personnel monitoring the national frontier wards detected an incoming portkey that cut right through the redirection array with little effort. It's clear the source was from France, somewhere around Paris or a little further south perhaps."

"Yes." Alain agreed. "Gabrielle and one of her friends were just getting settled in school for the day when a portkey ripped them straight out of their classroom. The geographical location fits."

The man allowed some disappointment to show, "I was hoping you had caught them at the border."

A wizard in ICW robes stepped up. "Monsieur Delacour. While we were unable to contain the target in transit, we do have an approximate landing zone mapped out."

"And?"

"They will be found somewhere on a line between Holyhead and York." The wizard replied.

"That's still too much area to cover." Alain cursed.

"Never the less, we have every available patrol scouring the target area. Each group has a portkey tracking specialist with them."

Amelia turned to the ICW wizard. "I want the entire curse detection grid focused on that strip of land. If even a single charm is cast I want a team to apparate in and confront the wizard or witch that cast it."

"And the rest of the country?" He asked.

"The under-aged magic array can't be reset geographically. We'll tweak the magical classes detected and have that team pay particular attention to portkeys and apparation in case the girls are moved." Amelia answered. "The other girl? If you don't mind..."

"Aimee Devereux is one of Gabrielle's closest friends. Apparently she was acting out of character this morning. She had the portkey on her. A team of my best aurors is sifting through her home even now."

The British Minister of Magic turned to her French ally. "Does your family know?"

Alain flinched. "I received a call from Beauxbatons even before I heard from Gabrielle's school. It seems as though Mister Potter was the first soul outside of Joliebatons to know... and he reacted predictably by alerting Miss Granger and disappearing, supposedly to affect some form of rescue. My wife and eldest are even now contacting other members of the family."

Amelia nodded. She had just sent a runner to Hogwarts with the twin missions of informing the Headmistress and of mining the students for possible leads. The odds were long but students like young Lord Malfoy would be 'interviewed' just the same.

"Unspeakables?" Alain asked.

Amelia furrowed her brows. "They were willing to admit that a summoning circle of some sort has been active this morning. As usual, they wouldn't give any useful details... except that the circle is already dispelled. The creature summoned to our world is presumably back in its home dimension again."

"I don't see a connection." Alain muttered.

"Nor do I, but it was the only information I've managed to pull from an Unspeakable in the many years I've known of the bastards so I thought it might be important somehow." Amelia replied.

Alain snorted. "Thank Jeanne our own research department is more open... if only they had more influence past French borders."

"I'll be sure to push for reforms in the Department of Mysteries just as soon as my administration becomes stable."

The two turned to address other issues which were cropping up with startling speed. As the news of the Angel Gabrielle's disappearance spread, the Wizarding World caught fire.

-o\0/o-

"And that, class, is how a summoning circle is used." Bellatrix taunted the two schoolgirls trapped in Riddle Manor. "You summon the damned... you put them in their place... and then you send them screaming back to hell where they belong."

Bellatrix giggled and began dancing across the room. She pranced over to the summoning circle and began to pirouette above it, smearing the blood lined runes and rendering the circle useless.

Gabby was distraught. She was worn out from crying and she still felt the pain of a knife wound that was only closed due to restrictive ropes. Painfully restrictive ropes. Even so, she wanted out of these ropes, she wanted out of this room and she wanted to be well shot of these bad, bad people. She wanted to take Aimee back with her and find out what was wrong with her friend. Mostly, she wanted to feel Harry's love again because he was being really quiet and that scared her more than anything else so far. There had to be something she could do. She wanted out. She wanted out and she wanted out now.

Maybe there was something Gabby could try.

"Hey! Hey you!"

Gabby yelled at the dark witch dancing in place. Bellatrix looked Gabby in the eyes just like Gabby wanted.

"Let. Me. Go." Gabby poured all of her will into the command. Her eyes flashed with power.

Bellatrix looked confused for a moment but then she seemed to accept the command and raised her wand as if to remove the ropes.

"Bella!" A harsh voice called.

"Yes Master?" She answered, head tilting to the side but still holding her wand on Gabby.

"Do not let her go!" Voldemort barked.

Bellatrix's mouth opened once, then twice, then she began to lower her wand.

"You..." Bellatrix whispered getting visibly angry. "You monster... look what you almost made me do. How could you?"

Bellatrix was about to tear into the little troublemaker but her master regained control of the situation first.

"Now Bella," The shade soothed, "no need to damage my prize."

Bellatrix lowered her head in shame. "I am sorry, my Lord."

The shade approached his faithful servant. "I do not blame you, my dear. The girl is full of surprises. Just think of how much fun it will be to unleash those surprises on those who would torment us."

Bella's smile returned quickly. "Yes, my Lord."

Having calmed his own servant, the shade turned to deal with the real problem. A naughty, naughty little girl.

"You." Voldemort bit out.

Gabby nervously looked around the darkened room before turning back to look at the sentient shadow.

"Thinking of escape? No, no, no little girl. I own you now. I got you. You will never see Potter again."

Gabrielle scrunched up her eyebrows and pouted in defiance. It was cute but otherwise unproductive.

"I see you think I am wrong. Perhaps you will save your strength to fight when the time is right? Hmmmmmm?" The shade quickly turned

to its servant. "Bella. We have yet to reward young Miss Devereux for her service. Reward her, will you?"

Bellatrix's smile grew tenfold as she turned to the little brown haired girl stuck to the wall. She raised her wand and tossed a mild cutting curse at the girl's arm.

"Oooooooooowwwwww! Maman! I want my Maman! I want my parents!" Aimee moaned. "I'm sorry Gabby! They ma-ade m-e do it! I didn't want t-to!"

"Mummy?" Bellatrix cackled. "Your mummy is dead! Your maman is morte. Your papa is morte to. Do you understand? Morte!"

A second cutting curse hit Aimee's other arm not that it had the impact of the first. Aimee got enough of Bellatrix's message to understand the truth. Her parents were dead. She was already sobbing uncontrollably before the second curse broke her skin.

"Stopit stopit stopit!" Gabby wailed.

"If you want your little friend to survive this day then you will do as you are told." Voldemort informed her curtly.

Gabby sniffled. She didn't want Aimee to die. She was still confused about why Aimee did what she did but Gabby would never want to see her friend dead.

"O – okayyyyyy..." Gabrielle moaned in submission.

"I – I'm sorry, Gabby. I'm so sorry..." Aimee called hoarsely from the wall.

Gabby used what little strength she had left to nod Aimee's way. "It's okay, Aimee. We'll be okay, just you wait."

"Now this is what is going to happen." Bellatrix informed Gabrielle. "I'm going to undo these ropes. Then I am going to put you in a new position on top of that altar behind you."

Gabby nodded dutifully.

Bellatrix raised her wand once again and banished the ropes holding Gabby with a light flick. Before she could react in any way, Gabby found herself airborne and moving above the altar that had been behind her. Her trip through the air was short and soon enough she found herself carefully deposited face down atop something bumpy. Whatever it was, it was cool and -brrrrrr- felt kind of like a side of beef or something. Were they planning to eat her?

Four chains flew out of the darkness and pulled the young Veela's body taught over the altar and the side of beef. The chains pulled her arms and legs spread-eagle, running to each corner of the altar.

"Oowwww!" Gabby cried out.

Because of all the pulling, her arm hurt really bad where the stone knife cut her open.

"Do something about her arm, Bella. We don't want our prize to bleed to death before the ritual even begins."

"Yes Master." Bellatrix answered.

Gabby felt the tingle of healing magic wash over her arm. She wasn't healed all the way but the worst of the pain disappeared. The bleeding stopped too.

"Can -" Gabby coughed out, "can you heal Aimee too? Please?"

Out of the corner of her eye, Gabby saw the woman turn to Aimee. Aimee was whimpering on the wall, blood painted her forearms and her face was a mask of misery.

"Stupefy." Bellatrix called out casually.

A red beam of magical light shot from Bellatrix's wand to impact Aimee in the center of the girl's chest.

"All better now." Bellatrix chuckled.

Gabby didn't say anything. They hurt Aimee the last time she said something.

The dark shade drifted closer to Gabrielle once more. "You have been better behaved. Perhaps it is time to give you a bit of a reward, yes?"

Gabby tried to look into the shade's... well what would pass for its eyes... and she nodded.

"Bella. More candles, dear."

Light flared over the room. Gabby still wouldn't call it well lit, but she could see much better than before. Then she looked down at the thing she had been chained to.

Oh. God.

Gabby lost it. She screamed.

"Tuck her in, won't you my dear Bella? We have much to do this night and I fear I am not well suited to childcare."

"Yes my Lord."

Red light flared, not that Gabby noticed. She was too busy screaming at the corpse of her Lord, Harry Potter. She blacked out a heartbeat later when Bellatrix's stunner hit her.

-o\0/o-

Harry's hands slid softly though the grass as he gazed at the clouds above. His fingers found Jeanne's hand for a moment as the two souls let the peace of lying watching clouds float by sooth their hearts and minds.

Harry looked first at the hand and then at the girl it belonged to.

"Send me back."

"I can't do that."

"She needs me."

"This is true, but you can't do anything about that right now."

"She's in pain. I can feel it."

Jeanne looked Harry in the eye. "Don't you think that is a good thing?"

"Gabby in pain is good?" He said incredulously.

"No you fool. That you can still feel her is a good thing."

Harry looked off into the distance. He focused inward on his bond with Gabrielle. It was still there. He could feel her. That was a good thing. Voldemort hadn't broken the bond they shared.

"But I can't save her from here."

"No you can't. Some trials Gabrielle must endure unaided such as what she is experiencing now."

"But I can't let her do this alone. I won't let her do it alone."

"But you haven't left her alone, have you?"

Harry thought about it about it. He could feel her. He was with her.
"No. Not really."

"You cannot aid her directly, but you can give her the support she needs. Give her your love. Strengthen her heart. Do this and she may yet prevail over her tormentors."

Harry closed his eyes, slid his hands through the grass and took in the fresh scent of the Elysian Fields. He focused inward. He focused on Gabrielle.

"I'm here for you, my Angel." Harry spoke to his heart. "I will always be here for you."

-o\0/o-

-Splash-

"Wakey-wakey, you little half-breed whore!" An annoyingly insane voice sing-songed.

Bellatrix's Aguamenti charm served to wake Gabrielle up very uncomfortably. The little Veela was cold. She was wet. Her arm was sore. She was still chained face down over Harry's dead body.

'I'm here for you, my Angel.' A voice inside of her called. 'I will always be here for you.'

Gabby smiled. Luckily, neither the shade of Voldemort nor his loyal witch seemed to notice. Bellatrix cast something that buzzed across her back. Gabby felt a hand touch her, the back of her shirt was pulled away. They must have cut part of her shirt off.

"Ahhhh," The Dark Lord spoke up. "So nice to see you back with us again, my little pet."

Gabby strained her neck to try and look around.

"Don't be alarmed. Bella is just performing a few final preparations before my grand re-entry into the Wizarding World. A few runes will be placed on your delicate little back. It may seem a pity to mar such smooth, unblemished skin but I assure you it is quite necessary. There will be a few control runes, loyalty runes of course... obedience... magical dependence... were I alive I might have simply given you the Dark Mark, but needs must when the devil drives. Bella's work won't be pretty but it is for a very good cause. My cause."

Voldemort seemed to be in a talkative mood, but then the dark bastard's always been rather chatty in Harry's experience. Gabby snuck another secret smile. Harry was commenting on her situation again.

Bella came closer, summoning more candles as she approached. With the room lighting improving, Gabby watched the dark witch put a basin full of red liquid on the altar in front of her. Bella also placed a pile of folded black clothes near the basin with a pair of glasses and a familiar wand on top. It was the cold wand, the wand Gabby used until she got her Harry wand back. It was the wand she used in Hogsmeade to punish all those bad people. After tearing her eyes away from the creepy cold wand, Gabby took time to spy Aimee hanging motionless on the wall. Hopefully her friend was just sleeping.

"I am ready, my Lord." The older witch said.

Gabby's attention was pulled to the rather scary looking athame in Bella's right hand.

"Proceed." The shade responded.

Gabby watched Bellatrix dip the blade into the basin before pulling it back out. Bella noted the look and smiled.

"Blood of an enemy – or in this case blood of the family of an enemy. Evans blood."

The knife moved over Gabby's head. Gabby felt a drop of blood hit her bare shoulder after dripping off the blade.

"This is the fun part!" Bellatrix giggled. "Feel free to scream and thrash about as much as you want, you little half-breed. Thrashing about will make it hurt more, of course, so please do a lot of that!"

Gabby ground her teeth together and hissed as the athame bit into her back right between her shoulder blades. She hissed but she did not cry out. Harry was very proud of his Angel and he let her know this as much as he could.

Bella's smile faltered a bit at the lack of noise but she kept at her work. The little half-breed bitch was letting out silent tears. That was something at least.

"You give me strength, Harry." Gabrielle whispered to herself.

Voldemort's shade must have heard something. "Oh? What was that?"

Gabby kept quiet this time.

"Say whatever farewells you may my pet, for in less than ten minutes I will be your new master... exactly one year to the very minute since Harry Potter died in Black Lake and claimed your allegiance. Only one year serving Harry Potter and now you shall spend the rest of eternity serving Lord Voldemort. Potter used you to make his displeasure known to Hogsmeade, my pet... and I shall

use you to make my displeasure known to London, Paris, Rome... well, everywhere."

As Gabby held her tongue, Harry thought of the Dark Lord's words. Old Ollivander did say that Tom Riddle did great things. Terrible, yes, but great. Harry swore to himself that Voldemort would do great things no longer.

-o\0/o-

"Good morning Wizing Britain. This is Constance Brown speaking to you live on Wizing Wireless Radio on behalf of all of those holding vigil here on Hogwarts grounds as we begin the second day of reflection and prayer for the safe return of Gabrielle Delacour, The Girl Who Lived, the Angel of Hogsmeade. We also pray for the safe return of the Ghost of Harry Potter, the Boy Who Died who gave Gabrielle Potter's Mark."

On Hogwarts grounds, the voice of Constance Brown carried via sonorus though her voice was also being bounced from magical radio station to magical radio station clear around the world.

"The very idea of the Angel Gabrielle being kidnapped straight out of her seat at school was Earth shattering enough that there are unnumbered reports of witches fainting at first news. The simultaneous loss of the Angel Gabrielle and Harry Potter as well as the suspicious actions and disappearance of one Aimee Devereux have all combined to create an international uproar which has lead to as many as twenty centenarians being rushed to St. Mungo's hospital. Reports are still unclear as to how many of our elderly wizards and witches were adversely affected in Miss Delacour's home country of France. I have received reports that vigils are being held in Paris along Rue Enchanté and in front of the shrine to the Angel Gabrielle at Domrémy-la-Pucelle. Here in the UK, large crowds have been confirmed on Diagon Alley, in Godric's Hollow and here on Hogwarts grounds.

"For those of you who are only now tuning in this morning, I should like to inform you that the newest rumor making its way through the crowds here at Hogwarts is that the Delacour family is due to arrive shortly. It is well known that the family planned to come here today as special guests of Minister for Magic Amelia Bones. Gabrielle and Harry Potter were both scheduled to receive Order of Merlins,

Harry's posthumously of course, for their actions against the dementor hoards and Dark Lord Voldemort. Many of Potter's friends and acquaintances who also participated in related battles were, and still are scheduled to receive awards today For their actions."

There was activity at Hogwarts' main gate. Word spread.

"And is that... it is! Ladies and gentlemen, wizards and witches, I should like to inform you that the Delacour witches have been spotted at the security checkpoint at Hogwarts Grounds' main gate. Yes... it's... I am being told that Apolline Delacour who is Gabrielle's mother, Fleur Delacour, the sister to Gabrielle and Triwizard Champion are coming this way. I am also told that Hermione Granger and Luna Lovegood have both arrived with the Delacours. Miss Lovegood, as you may remember, has recently been adopted by the muggle parents of Miss Granger since her pureblood father died under the former regime of Cornelius Fudge. Rumor has it that Mister Lovegood was executed for being a political threat to the Ministry even though his sentence was only life in prison. It has also been reported that Miss Lovegood-Granger herself was a fourteen year old political prisoner in Azkaban and is alive today only due to the heroic ICW raid which freed hundreds of innocent muggleborns and outspoken purebloods... Ladies and gentlemen..."

Down on the school grounds near the main gate, Gabrielle's family walked in solemn procession up the path to the very doors of Hogwarts Castle. Apolline walked alone, a show of strength as her husband was too deeply embroiled in the work of hunting down and finding their Little Angel. Her cheeks were tear stained, but she held her head high. She was the strength that held her charges together. Behind her, Fleur and Segolene walked arm in arm. Neither was crying at the time but both showed clear signs of recent distress. Just behind them, the Grangers and their adopted child walked four abreast with the girls in the middle. Of the four only Daniel was able to make it up the path with dry cheeks.

Along the auror lined path stood wizards and witches, friends and strangers alike who came to share in the family's pain if only to show that they were not alone. Further up the trail, the family delegation came to find the entire population of Hogwarts lining the path. First they passed mixed groups of claws and snakes. Soon the whole of Hufflepuff house lined both sides of the path, nodding as the family and their former classmates passed. Cedric was there holding

Susan tightly and whispering to her that they would seek out the family as soon as they entered the school. Gryffindor House had claimed the path nearer to the castle entry doors and every lion called out to 'Mrs. Delacour', 'Fleur', 'Luna' and of course 'Hermione' as the witch in question passed by. Luna would only later admit that this was the highest number of times she could ever remember hearing her proper first name instead of her old moniker 'Loony' in her entire Hogwarts career.

When the women plus one man finally reached the grand entry hall doors, they were met by both Headmistress McGonagall and Minister Bones.

"Apolline," Amelia consoled, "I am so very sorry to see you going through this. I swear on my magic that we will find the culprit and return your daughter to you alive and well."

It was a bold claim even if it wasn't perfectly worded as a magically binding vow. There was still enough intent in the words that Amelia would be sorry should the search ever be given up or worse yet find a corpse.

Minister Bones was only able to persuade her foreign guests to come at all due to a mixture of public support, public demand and private assurances of safety. After speaking to the Scottish Headmistress, many attendees began to think that the reason that Gabby was taken when she was due to the new impenetrable wards of Hogwarts and tight ICW security.

Minerva came forward and embraced Apolline. The old Scot had tears of her own showing as Little Angel had been one of her own students even if only for a short while. The little lass found her way into the Headmistress's heart in record time such was Gabby's charm and innocence.

Close friends and family soon wound up in the Great Hall's side chamber, the very same room that Fleur remembered being introduced to the 'leettle boy' Potter for the first time. Other well wishers were to be allowed into the Great Hall itself where, should things warrant it, official announcements may be made later.

There in the old magical castle, the distraught family would sit and wait while taking comfort where they could. They sat and

commiserated and bonded and waited. They waited for any news of Gabby, Harry and Aimee, good or ill.

In the days after this troubled time, some would claim that a phoenix's comforting song could be heard in the hall at half past ten or thereabouts. Some wizards would deny hearing any such thing yet many more would claim that it was so.

-o\0/o-

The runes were done.

Bellatrix had gone over them twice looking for errors and found none. A spell was cast that seared the runes shut, sealing Petunia Dursley nee Evans' blood into Gabby's back in a magical act of enslavement. Evans blood taken unwillingly now flowed through Gabrielle's veins and soon it would flow again in her master.

Gabby could still feel Harry within her but she herself did feel a little... fuzzy in the head? Her back was all tingly. She felt a little sleepy but without the yawning and sleeping bits. And dizzy too.

"Now, Master?" Bellatrix asked after silently running a series of analysis charms.

Voldemort looked imperiously at Gabby one last time before nodding his head. "Now."

Bella lit up as though Christmas came early. She eagerly took up the basin of blood and began pouring it onto the altar. Funny... Gabby never noticed the channels carved into the stone before. The balance of Aunt Petunia's harvested blood soon lost itself in the stone channels and distributed itself to parts unknown. It was then that Gabby noticed the other item in the basin.

A heart. A beating human heart.

Bellatrix must have seen where Gabby's interest lay. She chuckled.

"You can't use a person's lifeblood if the heart isn't still pumping you know... but who ever said the heart had to be in that person's body? It doesn't! My Lord is truly the greatest mage ever to walk the Earth."

While Bellatrix was getting wound up, Petunia's heart was slowing down.

Voldemort gave one more command to his servant. "You know what to do."

"Of course, my Lord." She answered eagerly. "I look forward to your glorious return."

The shade looked into Gabby's eyes one last time. "You are mine..." And then his form faded into Harry's corpse.

Had Gabby been firing on all cylinders this would be where she tried to eye-flash Bellatrix again, but she wasn't, so the dark witch continued with her work unimpeded.

Bellatrix drew her wand high and began waving. Every third jab or so she would murmur something under her breath. If Gabby had been watching, she would have noticed the blood in the channels beneath Harry's body disappearing into Harry. She did feel the runes on her back warming up.

-o\0/o-

"Hello, Tom." A voice came out of the darkness.

"Potter!" Voldemort growled roughly. "I banished you from this plane! How dare you show yourself before me again?"

The Dark Lord turned to face this constant pain in his side only to find the boy casually sitting on the stair of a cozy residential staircase wrapping around a cupboard. The two took each others measure. Harry for his part looked little different than when he was last alive. He was scrawny, slightly short for his age and wearing a school dress shirt and a pair of black slacks with shoes to match. He was also wearing a Gryffindor tie and his signature glasses. For his part, Voldemort looked more like an older Tom Riddle than the monster from Quirrell's head or from the Battle of Hogwarts. He seemed almost respectable for a Dark Lord with his chiseled features, dark hair, black cloak and pale wand – but the eyes... he had red eyes.

"Welcome to Privet Drive, Tom. Care for something to eat or drink? Some lasagne perhaps? Don't worry, I'm quite good with a skillet and an oven you know." Potter answered after turning away with casual indifference. The wallpaper seemed much more interesting. "Going to have to glue this corner down. It's coming loose."

Riddle didn't deign to answer with more words. His right arm snapped up wand in hand and released a powerful banishing charm right into Harry's chest.

It didn't connect. Harry wasn't there. In fact, Riddle's spell didn't even hit the staircase as the stairs themselves didn't exist anymore. Voldemort wasn't in four Privet Drive any longer.

Tom looked around the room he now found himself in. It was obviously a little girl's bedroom with the princess bed and the full stuffed plushy menagerie and other girlish things.

"Is that any way to treat your host, Tom?" Harry called as he lay on the bed amidst the plushies.

Riddle snapped out an explosion hex only to see the prisoner's chair in courtroom seven explode in a cloud of splinters and iron shrapnel.

"I don't blame you one bit for that one." Harry called from the judge's box. "Not my favorite spot to remember Gabby either. I hated that chair."

Riddle held his fire for a moment. He had fought countless duels and sprung countless traps before but he had never seen his own spells dodged the way Harry dodged those last two. He was unused to seeing reality bend itself this easily. Perhaps he could learn something here after all.

"Bravo, Potter." Tom clapped though he was careful not to lower his wand. "I must congratulate you on your survival against all odds. I'd love to know how you pulled such a feat off."

Harry smiled. "Well you see, funny story that, it all started when I – sod off you bloody bastard." The smile fell into a snarl by the end of it.

Riddle frowned before affecting a professor's facade. "Such disrespect, young man. Your house shows in your actions. Brave... perhaps but foolhardy would be a better description. Your dodges show talent, I'll give you that, but what can you do to hurt me? Care to try, little boy?"

Harry appeared to think on it a moment.

"This body is mine. Gabby is mine. She will always be mine and I will always be a part of her. Get out." Harry replied, and the world shifted yet again.

Harry now appeared on his broom several paces away from Tom Riddle. The both of them also happened to be a hundred meters above a Quidditch pitch. Tom did fall at first, though he caught himself a second later. He did it broomlessly too.

"I'll admit I didn't know you could pull that trick." Harry called as he blurred by his foe. "I'll have to try harder!"

And then Harry was coming right for Voldemort.

-Crack-

Correction, a bludger fired off the teen's beater bat was careening towards the Dark Lord's head at lethal speeds.

Boooooom

The bludger exploded into a fine mist right before Harry blew by his distraction and drove his bat right through Tom's face.

-Crunch-

Tom roared in pain. He had to dodge Harry's second pass in order to heal his own face enough to go back on an offensive run.

"You seem to forget boy!" He raged while tossing curses at Harry. "You and I have been connected ever since you denied me my victory in Eighty-one! My link to this body did not fade with your death. Avada Kedavra! And yet your spirit was nowhere to be found when Snape and then Bella checked and rechecked my future vessel. Crucio! Why are you here?"

The blur that was Harry Potter slipped behind Gryffindor's stands for cover. This may not be the physical world but he was fairly certain those Unforgivables would still be bad for his health should he let one connect.

"This must come as a shock to you, Tom, but you simply don't understand what you are messing with here."

"Is that so?" Riddle asked while trying to catch the teen in an aerial game of cat and mouse. "Do you really believe you, a failure of a schoolboy knows more magical lore than I, a Dark Lord?"

"You are not just trying to steal my body, you tosser. You've got your sights set on my angel as well. My death in Black Lake forged a bond with Gabrielle the likes of which you will never be able to match. I'm not anchored to my corpse, I'm anchored to Gabby!"

That thought brought Voldemort to a halt. There were forces at work here that he did not understand.

"No matter." He growled, carefully scanning the pitch. "I will eject you from this body and I will claim my new pet. You will not prevail. I will enjoy ejecting you from this plane of existence yet again."

Suddenly the two were only an arm's length away from each other under the stands.

Voldemort cast Fiendfyre.

He missed.

-o\0/o-

Outside of Harry and Voldemort's spiritual battlefield, Petunia Dursley's disembodied heart beat for the very last time. Bellatrix could not restrain her mirth.

"Ah, ha!" She crowed, spittle flying into Gabby's hair. "Any moment now his eyes will open and my Lord will take back what is his!"

The insane woman then skipped over to the unresponsive girl on the wall. She put her wand tip up to Aimee's throat and smiled.

"You will be the first to die..." But then Bellatrix looked back to the altar and the two forms bound atop it. "Or even better, I'll have Master make you kill her. Yes! Make the half-breed slave kill the foreign bitch! What fun!"

Bellatrix cast a silent Enervate upon Aimee. "Wakey-wakey little girl. You won't want to miss this..."

-o\0/o-

"Harry?"

"Yes, Jeanne?"

"Your ride is here."

"Was that even a saying when you were alive?"

"Not really, no."

"Then how do you know about it?"

"I did more than pray as a ghost, Harry."

Harry turned his head and stared at Jeanne through the soft grass. She pinked a bit.

"So I prayed most of the time. I still heard things going on around me... watched the sun rise or set occasionally... watched children play once or twice."

"Sorry."

Harry stood up, dusted himself off and helped Jeanne to her feet.

"Until we meet again, fair maiden." Harry dipped into a low bow and brushed her knuckles with his lips.

Jeanne giggled and pulled the boy into a hug.

"I'm not saying you should go falling on swords or anything," she murmured as they embraced, "but if you should misplace your heartbeat again, you know where to find me."

Harry eventually pulled free of the best friend he would ever meet in death. She also beat most people he met in life as well.

"It's a date."

Existence shifted around him and as it did his smirk fell. Once more he found himself at four Privet Drive, only this time he was in the garden out back.

"You?" A startled voice called out. "What are you doing here?"

"Hello, Aunt Petunia." Harry answered, all trace of emotion gone from his voice. "Figured it out yet?"

She stood there for a moment, angry and confused at the same time.

"You're dead. You know that, right?" Harry prodded.

Anger pushed confusion out of the way entirely. "And I wouldn't be if not for your freak friends and your freak war! Why couldn't you lot leave decent respectable people well enough alone?"

"Bellatrix Lestrange is no friend of mine, I assure you." Harry countered. "I'll bet your death hurt a lot, didn't it?"

"Leave me alone!" The pained spirit cried. "Go back to the hell that spawned you so that I may be reunited with my maker above you as it was meant to be for all eternity!"

"So you don't want to chit-chat." It's been a long time since he was a little boy crying himself to sleep in the cupboard under the stairs, but he still remembered those nights. It still hurt. "Right."

Harry moved a bit to the side so that he could better present her options. He used one hand to point to a broom leaning up against the back shed.

"If you want to spend eternity with your sister, my Mum, hop on that broom and it will take you right to her. Promise."

Harry brought up his other hand, this time pointing towards the house.

"Should you prefer to spend eternity with your husband then all you need to do is..."

Harry stopped. She'd already turned for the door into the kitchen. He watched her enter the house... he watched her pull the door shut behind her... and he ground his teeth together in anger as she never once turned back to look at her nephew one last time.

"Bitch." He said, not that there was anyone around to hear him. "Oh well, I've done my good deed for the day."

Harry looked to the horizon and the unknown. He felt like doing a bit of Maiden Saving. He felt like doing it right now, too. As quickly as he had arrived, he was gone.

-o\0/o-

Gabby snapped into consciousness from her earlier dazed state. She licked her lips and slowly turned her head this way and that. There was Aimee, alive thank Jeanne, sobbing on the wall once more. There was the insane witch Bellatrix who was now scowling at an unexpectedly alert Gabrielle. There was Bellatrix's shoe laces tying themselves into a knotty mess.

Pardon me?

Gabby's eyes flew wide open in excitement. Harry was here. Harry came back! She smiled despite the runes magically pushing against her will to resist enslavement.

"Why you little twat!" Bella barked. "How dare you be happy! Don't you understand what is about to happen to you?"

Gabby nodded eagerly. "Uh-huh!"

"And you're happy about it? Are you crazy?"

Bellatrix also missed seeing the silvery spectral boy float up out of the floorboards to hover behind her.

"Don't call Angel crazy!" Harry shouted into her ear.

Bella jerked into action, or she would have had she not lost her balance. She fell in a tangled mess due to her tangled footwear.

"I'll take that!" Harry shouted.

Bellatrix cursed as she realized that her wand was missing.

-snap-

"My wand!" The furious witch shrieked. "You bastard!"

But she was never one to give up easily. Bellatrix quickly pulled her tangled feet under her body and leapt for the athame at the near end of the altar.

She got it. Fingers white against the leather grip, Bellatrix made a desperate horizontal slash that opened up both Harry's body's arm and Gabrielle's arm as well. They both started bleeding. Gabby screamed in pain.

"Never again!" Harry bellowed and fought Bellatrix's for control of the athame. Bellatrix tumbled onto her back and Harry followed her down. The two were now struggling over who could apply more force on the deadly ritual blade.

Whether it was due to true muscle strength or perhaps her crazed state, Bellatrix slowly managed to turn the blade up at Harry. Harry laughed for a moment and let go. As Bella's mad thrust pierced his chest and then the empty air beyond, he moved his hands to her throat. He squeezed.

Bellatrix belatedly realized that the athame couldn't kill a ghost and dropped it so she could go for his wrists instead. As Harry was still a ghost, she failed. She tried to prop herself up to either reach for a hostage or to reach for her tangled footwear. Ghost or not, Harry was well capable of holding her down and suffocating her.

Bella's eyes bulged. Her face shifted from color to color. Her body heaved and shook. She could not break free. Nearly a minute into it,

Bellatrix's struggles became weak. They slowed. Another twenty seconds later, she fell limp in Harry's grasp.

Harry slowly backed off and grabbed the athame.

"Is she dead?" Aimee called hoarsely from the wall. "Did you kill her?"

Gabby was watching Bellatrix closely. She answered Aimee's question. "No. She's not dead yet. She could still be dangerous though."

"Just a moment."

Harry looked around at the girls, the altar, the floor and the floating candles. He looked at the slowly bleeding corpse that even now hosted another battle between two forces. His extension, the part of Harry that makes its home in Gabrielle was holding Voldemort at bay for now. If the man hadn't chosen to tie Gabby to him with Evans blood that battle would never have been possible. Voldemort might have already succeeded in inhabiting Harry's body if he had just left Gabby alone.

"I've got a plan... I think." Harry flew over to the wand resting gently atop the pile of clothes by Gabby's head. He picked up the wand and slipped it into Gabby's right hand.

"Harry... I'm still chained up. What am I supposed to do with it?"

"Don't think about a single target. I want you to undo all the magic you can. Everything, as much as you can all around us. Undo it all."

Gabby looked at her Lord and nodded. She took a breath. She firmly grasped the wand – but not too firmly. She reviewed the words and motions in her mind. She thought about how badly Harry wanted it to work. She thought about how badly she wanted to be free.

"Finite Incantatem!"

A wave of magical light flooded the room.

Aimee fell to the floor with a thump and a squeak. The floating candles disappeared. The drapes blocking two windows

disappeared. The chains holding Gabby down vanished. The altar they were resting on reverted to the dusty rotting bed that it had originally been before Voldemort returned. Interestingly, the clothes and athame stayed put. Those items must not have been charmed or transfigured. Also, Gabby was free.

Unknown to Harry or Gabby, she also just killed the house's ward scheme.

"Ow!"

Gabby was still bleeding from a long cut in her arm, but she could deal with it for a few more minutes if she had to. It didn't matter. She got up.

"Gabby?"

"Yes?"

"Make the bad witch stop."

"Yes, Harry."

Gabby pointed her spare wand at the bad witch and commanded her to "Stop!"

Bellatrix's whole being seized up into a state of suspended animation. She was not dead but neither was she a danger to the girls.

"Okay, Angel. We've been over what happens next..." Gabby's eyes shot wide open. "I'll need to get in there and claim what's mine. You know what to do, just like Michael and Gabriel and Lucifer showed us..."

Gabby nodded her head so hard Dobby would have been impressed. Harry came up to his Angel and planted a light ghostly kiss on her cheek.

"The next time I do that, I'll have real lips. Promise."

Gabby's smile was wide enough to show all her teeth as she watched Harry disappear inside his own body.

"Gabby?" A small voice whispered from behind the girl.

Gabby turned. "Aimee!" The young Veela jumped at her miserable friend and wrapped her in a super tight hug. Both girls had bloody, torn up arms but a 'we're alive' hug was far more important than that.

"I'm sorry. I'm so very sorry!" Aimee began to sniffle again and if Harry weren't about to be alive Gabby would surely have cried along with her.

"I forgive you." Gabby consoled her friend. "You said they made you do it."

"They did! I didn't want to do it – please believe I didn't want to!"

Gabby pulled Aimee close and cuddled cheek to cheek. "I know. You would never do something like that on purpose. We'll be best friends forever and ever."

Aimee nodded furiously at that. After another few seconds of comfort, Gabby loosened up her cuddles.

"I need to help Harry now."

"O – okay." Aimee pulled back, head down.

Gabby hated to see her friend that way. Luckily, she had a way to fix that. Gabby smiled, thought of her Lord, and released her thrall fully into the room. It hit Aimee like a freight train made of love, peace and contentment. And with Aimee's mental reset, Gabby felt it was time to call out to her Lord.

"My heart is yours, Lord. Your blood in my veins."

Aches and pains slipped away. She no longer felt the blood and grime of the last twenty-six hours.

"My spirit is yours, Lord. Your will guides my hand."

Gabby's heart filled with love. All along her spine the blood runes meant to control and enslave began to glow and hiss.

"Through me you know eternal life; through you I know eternal love."

All of the runes, the cuts and the bruises on Gabrielle's body vanished in a wave of pure angelic power. Downy white feathers covered her skin, an owlsh beak formed on her face and pure white feathery wings sprang forth from her back.

Aimee had fallen to her knees, hands on the floor, as she watched her friend change. For the first time in two days she was free of torment. What few tears she had left were shed in joy.

Gabrielle turned to the body on the bed. She climbed onto the tattered and dirty bedding and knelt down next to Harry. A few angel tears later and the slow bleeding wound in his arm was no more. Gabby then straddled his waist.

Spotting the athame nearby, the little angel picked it up. She held it in her right hand with her fingers near the tip in order to have better control when cutting. She brought up her other hand meaning to cut into the meat of her own palm. As she began to cut a very small ankh into her skin, she whispered part of her prayer over again.

"Through meeee... you... knowwww... eternal life..."

Once she was satisfied that she had succeeded in creating a perfect ankh, she leaned over to etch a similarly sized ankh directly above Harry's heart.

"Through youuuuu... I know... eternalllllll... love."

Gabrielle then pressed the two open wounds together and spoke one last line.

"Come back to me my Lord, I need you."

The little angel in a bedroom in Riddle Manor called wordlessly to her natural powers. She raised her wings until their tips were only a hand width apart and within that narrow gap blue-white fire sprang to life. Slowly, that fire became a pulsing glowing ring as her wings began to lower.

Once more Gabrielle's halo of angelic fire followed her wings in their downward swing. Once more the glowing fiery ring sang louder and

louder as as it fell; and just as she had in Hogsmeade, Gabrielle held her halo steady at its widest point. She was not teleporting. She was not going anywhere. She was channeling her power for all it was worth, turning it in and pushing it down. She was giving her life, her love, her magic and her soul to her Lord.

Her power now filled the room burning away all shadows. It poured through the windows and rang loudly throughout the house. It shook windows, rattled silverware and scared away the house-elf. It showed up on every magical detection system within three thousand kilometers of Riddle Manor. It caused a phoenix to sing.

-o\0/o-

The Chamber of Secrets opened and Harry Potter shot out of the entry like a bat out of hell.

A sharp right and he was at the open bathroom door. Corkscrew left and he was down the hall and half-way to the Grand Stair before Voldemort even made it to Myrtle's loo. When the Dark Lord did make it up to the bathroom, his scream of incandescent fury would have frightened every soul in Hogwarts were this the real Hogwarts and were someone there to hear it.

Lucius Malfoy was lucky that he was dead and that his body had been turned to ash long before or the Dark Lord would have tortured the arrogant pureblood to within an inch of his life nightly for years. His body would have been raised as an inferi to serve as an object lesson to fools and imbeciles the world over. Voldemort did not like seeing proof that one of his Horcruxes had been destroyed and the monster in the chamber was dead. But Tom Riddle did not have the time to plot vengeance upon the remainder of the Malfoy line at this time. No. There was still an annoyingly hard to catch Potter to unmake.

Riddle was graceful when he flew broomlessly. He was fast too, but his technique still lacked the kind of maneuverability required to chase down a wild speed freak on a Firebolt like Harry. It was a flaw Harry was quite good at exploiting due to his Quidditch game experience and Harry was using that skill even now to lead a Dark Lord on a merry chase. Harry couldn't help but grin as the wind rushed past his face and the corridors blurred by. He always did love flying and being the snitch was quite a change from chasing one.

This whole affair was very different from his normal end of year life or death struggles with Voldemort. It wasn't the end of the year for one and instead of being crushed by fear or raw pain, he was having great fun for another. Maybe it was because Harry was already dead... dying would surely mark a great turning point in anyone's life; Harry was sure any other dead person would agree with him there.

Of course, while Harry was a ghost most of his close friends and family were still alive. This was a condition that Voldemort seemed keen on reversing if only Harry would give him the opportunity to do so. Harry did not want to oblige him. That made what Harry was doing right now quite important even if it was fun.

Harry was actually fighting little more than a delaying action until Harry could come and take the reigns from Harry. It was a confusing thought even for Harry until he focused on how he was with his Angel even when he wasn't physically there with her. And until he did arrive it was all a big game of Tickle the Dragon until reinforcements arrived. Harry needed the game to change eventually in part because he felt a tug, a slight pull somewhere in his mindscape that felt uncomfortably like Voldemort did – like his old headaches felt – and he did not want this game to last long enough for Voldemort to stumble onto the source of this feeling and use it against Harry somehow.

After what seemed to Harry an inordinately long time that help did indeed arrive. One minute he was flying straight down the Grand Stair leading ol' Tommy on a merry chase and the next minute he was just a little more full of himself than before. Not Malfoy full of himself either.

It was time to turn things around.

Harry went all stop right before reaching the lowest level of the massive stone tower and turned himself around. Though not directly in view, he could feel the dark prat lurking about. They were in Harry's body after all and that gave Harry the home field advantage. He knew the Dark Lord was about to appear three floors up.

"Potter!" Voldemort brought his wand to bear.

Time to fight back.

"Eat this, Tom!" Harry shouted.

At Harry's words, the whole tower collapsed onto Riddle as though he were the center of a black hole. Tom's sorry arse was a Dark Hole. Ha!

Harry hovered on his beloved Firebolt, hundreds of meters above Black Lake, and watched Voldemort try to dig himself out. It was an impressive sight, truth be told. Riddle unleashed untold fire and destruction upon the stone pile that used to be Hogwarts in an effort to free himself of the tomb Harry had created.

This was probably good for both of them as it gave Harry a minute to rest and plot while it gave the Dark Lord a chance to unwind a little. Aside from the exploding castle, it was a very calm night. Good weather for flying about.

Harry watched as an explosion rocked the rubble, flinging bits of castle hundreds of meters away. Impressive. It looked as though Riddle finally snapped and began using his biggest tricks. A second blast as large as the first signaled the end of Tom's captivity and the resumption of hostilities.

Maybe calling for the whole of Black Lake to engulf Voldemort wouldn't help after all...

"Get off that damn broom, Potter!" Voldemort roared as he soared into the air on a collision course with the Boy Who Wouldn't Quit.

"Uh, oh..."

Harry felt his broom begin to buck under him. It shook and trembled in a motion that really brought back memories of his first year game, the one where Quirrell tried to kill him in front of the entire school. Harry knew it was time for another change of scenery and without further wasting time he traded the unstable broom for the stability of a snow covered island. Harry took in a deep breath and let his eyes wander over the old wooden dock pushing out into the snow and ice covered lake and the village on the other shore. He turned until his eyes rested on the majestic stone temple and its pair of massive guardian Veela. This was perfect.

Through me you know eternal life...

"Finally." A rough voice growled out behind him. "You're not so nimble on the ground, are you Potter?"

Harry slipped his hands into his pockets and turned around. Voldemort's wand dipped and... nothing happened. Harry allowed a devilish smirk to appear as the Dark Lord tried spell after spell to no effect.

"Problem, Tom?" Harry taunted.

"What have you done?" Riddle hissed in return.

Through you I know eternal love.

"It's not me," Harry countered, "it's this place. A place where no wizarding magic may be cast. I drew you into a trap that you will not be able to escape... unless it be by leaving this body entirely."

"What have you done to my magic?"

The Dark Lord began advancing ominously on Harry. Riddle seemed halfway between rage and panic, his hands rose towards Harry in a clear tell that he meant to grab Harry and beat the boy until magic started working again.

Come back to me my Lord, I need you.

Harry took a single step back, but as he did several things caught his notice. First, there were heavy thumps behind him which were accompanied by small tremors in the ground. The guardians have awakened. At the same time, a small blue-white mote of light flared about two meters off the ground in front of Harry. It expanded and lowered revealing an angel in a French schoolgirl's uniform. Gabrielle had come to Harry's aid.

Harry smiled and turned his eyes back to Riddle.

"You might want to turn tail and run, Tom." Harry taunted. "My trap is closing around you."

Riddle instinctively turned his wand on Gabrielle, not that it would do him any good. His eyes flitted between her and the two massive guardians that were even now preparing their lances to deal with the intruder. For perhaps the first time in any battle he's ever fought, Voldemort took an uncertain step backwards.

"A little girl, Potter?" Riddle scoffed. "You intend to defeat me with a little girl and two statues?"

Gabrielle shook her wings in indignation. She hated when grown-ups talked down at her. At least this time she knew she would be getting the last laugh.

"You're forgetting something, Tom." Harry cautioned the invader. "I said that all wizarding magic was worthless here. Angel doesn't need a wand to hand you your arse."

Riddle answered with a scowl and shot forward intending to simply grab Gabrielle before the hulking guardians could reach them.

Gabrielle was not worried. With a quick snap, her halo fell to chest level as an obvious message to Voldemort. She's cut him in half before. She could easily do it again. As Riddle shuddered to a halt before getting very far in his assault, Gabrielle readied herself for the next step.

"Really Tom?" Harry chuckled. "You had a chance to rush me or a little girl and you went for the girl?"

Gabrielle drew her wings up and as she did she held her hands out, palms up. She may not be true Veela like her Maman or Big Sissy Fleur, but she could prove that Veela got their powers from their angelic ancestors rather than the other way around. Harry's Angel drew power into her open palms summoning brilliant globes of blue-white fire.

Riddle took several more steps backwards onto the old wooden dock. Any further and he would fall into the boat frozen in place against the dock.

"You don't like being outnumbered, outgunned or outclassed, do you Tom?" Harry asked. "Why, I imagine that this is how all of your victims must have felt at one point or another. You and your

followers would sneak around ambushing people when they were at their weakest and you at your strongest. You begin to understand their pain, don't you Tom?"

"Fight me, Potter!" Riddle challenged. "Stop hiding behind a little girl and her toys and meet me man to man! Are you Gryffindor or are you not?"

"You know Tom," Harry responded. "I never told anyone about this... but the Sorting Hat did say that Slytherin would have helped me on the way to greatness."

Harry turned his attention to his Angel. "Roast him, Gabby."

The Dark Lord only had a moment to turn and run before Gabby's twin lances of angelic fury tore through his back and kept going until they blew great holes into the ice sheet beyond. With a cry of pain, the greatest threat to the Wizarding World since Gellert Grindelwald dissolved into a dark shade and fled to the physical world.

Harry turned to look into Gabrielle's glowing crystal blue orbs.

"Now, Angel." Harry said. "We have to catch him and end this. It has to be now."

Gabrielle nodded dutifully. There wasn't a moment to lose. Voldemort wasn't going to get away this time.

Harry and Gabrielle came together in a tight embrace. The young angel drew her wings up to the sky before deliberately pulling her halo down to waist level again. She carefully matched the ring she held here in Harry's mindscape to the one she held in the waking world. Harry dipped in to place a chaste kiss on his angel's forehead, right on the mark he gave her one year ago, and then he willed his spirit to answer his Angel's call.

She needed him and he would be there for her.

-o\0/o-

Aimee sat on the floor entranced by the spectacle before her.

Her best friend was sitting on top of the dead boy on the bed and they were both surrounded by a ring of magical fire that had to be the most awesome display of magic the nine year old girl had ever seen... likely the most awesome display of magic she ever would see.

Gabby held her position, and held her fire halo, for a few minutes or so before a most unwelcome thing happened. Aimee saw a dark shade shoot out of the dead boy's chest screaming like the hounds of hell were hot on its tail. Only then did Gabby bother to move at all.

As the shade turned, perhaps to get one last taunt in before fleeing to plot and plan, Gabby swiftly pulled her substitute wand to bear on her target and barked one word.

Stop!

And he did stop. The spell that Gabrielle used to stop a fire in her Momma's house, to hold dementors still, to protect herself from Fiendfyre and to keep Bellatrix Lestrange from being a pest... that spell she now used to block the Dark Lord's escape. The shade held still, frozen halfway between the bed and the far window.

Gabby's wand hand began to shake. She lost her angelic form and reverted to a little Veela girl with pretty silver-blond hair, pouty lips and huge tear filled eyes. She tried to cast another spell.

"N – nametta s-s-suuulee-e-e..." Gabby stopped. She furiously rubbed at her eyes, took a deep breath and tried again. "Nametta sule a-atal... at-t-t-al..."

Gabby brought down the wand for a moment and collected herself before taking another deep breath and raising the wand one more time.

As she tried to control the shakes in her wand arm, another arm came up next to hers. Another hand ever so gently pulled the wand from her grasp and pointed it dead center into the shade known as Dark Lord Voldemort.

Gabby shuddered from head to toe.

"I - I can do it, Harry." Gabby said with ever increasing strength. "I really can."

"I know you can, Angel." Harry answered her. "I know you are a wonderful, wonderful girl and you've done so much good today. You've done so much good all this year. You really have."

Harry's other hand came around the little Veela's waist and held her close. She shuddered again.

"You've done so much for me, Angel. Let me do this for you."

"O – okay, Harry."

Truly, Gabby felt sooooo much better. She could have done it. She would have done it. But she really, really didn't want to.

Gabby felt Harry's cheek come into contact with her ear. She closed her eyes and leaned into the heat of his skin. She heard the quick thump-thump of his heart beating. She knew absolutely for sure that everything would be okay now that her Lord was with her.

As softly glowing blue eyes closed in bliss, hard glinting green eyes narrowed at the object of Harry's ire. There would be no more posturing. No more speeches, battles or traps. Not for Tom Riddle. Never again.

"Nametta sule atalante firima."

There was no flash emitted nor was there any sound to track the magic with. In fact, the only way to tell that anything happened at all was by observing the mess of narrow black smokey filaments which seemed to appear. These dark tendrils had no structure other than that they originated in the Dark Lord's diaphragm and ended somewhere outside of the room. All except one that is. One of them didn't leave the room at all. That one snaked around Voldemort a few times before arcing across the room to anchor itself in Harry Potter's forehead. Right in his scar.

As Harry began to suspect in his recent deep mind games, his scar was a soul anchor for Voldemort the whole time. He wondered if Dumbledore knew about this before the old manipulator went for a swim in the wrong river.

After a second or two of simply floating about, all of the black filaments began to discolor near the end connecting to the Dark Lord. First they became a dull red... then they began to turn orange, slowly changing from smokey shadows to glowing lights as the colors changed. Soon enough one of the lines became bright white before snapping. The remainder of that line quickly unraveled before disappearing completely. Then another snapped. Then another. In short order Harry's link to Riddle was the last one remaining... until it too failed under the strain of disruptive soul magic.

At that point Gabby's 'stop' was the only thing holding Tom Riddle in this mortal plane.

"Finite Incantatem." Harry called, wand once again held high.

There was a twisting in Riddle's form and then an earsplitting scream... and then it was over. Tom Riddle was no longer a threat to anyone alive.

After a few moments of near perfect silence where Gabby's labored breathing was the loudest noise in the room, an uncomfortable grunt came from the door.

Gabby, Harry and Aimee all twisted around to see what caused the noise.

"Aurors." A man said in a subdued tone. He was clearly either deeply impressed by what he had walked in on or deeply disturbed. "Could you... could you please put down the wand?"

The aurors all had mottled grey cloaks with colorful patches over the breast showing three letters over black, red and yellow bars. ICW. The first two men to enter the room had wands drawn. The third had a pistol. The fourth a shotgun.

Harry seemed to remember just then that he was nude in a bed with a nine year old girl on his lap and another nine year old girl sitting on the floor nearby. Like she was waiting her turn or something.

It was all very awkward. Harry put down the wand.

"It's... not what it looks like?" Harry said nervously before whispering into Gabby's ear. "We are in so much trouble. Do you think you can 'encourage' them to forget any spells they may have heard us cast?"

Gabby swallowed and nodded her agreement. She would eye-flash the aurors the first time she thought she could get away with it.

"We forgot to bring 'Mione again." Harry whispered. "She is going to kill me."

End Chapter

Chapter Notes:

Coming soon – the Denouement and Epilogue. The internet tells me that denouement means 'untying' in French, so I think I already have the next chapter's title right there. Apparently the French word for epilogue is in fact epilogue, so I can only use that trick once.

Chapter Thirty: Untying

Alain made his way up the path from Hogwarts' gate to the castle doors in quick, hurried steps and the crowd went silent at his passing. Maybe it was his unreadable face or maybe it was the full ICW escort that followed him every step of the way but his presence reeked of importance. It reeked of fate. Of doom.

Something had happened.

Constance Brown continued to murmur over the crowd but she dare not predict the meaning of this visit. She didn't want to send the wrong message and put the Wizarding World into a tizzy only to be called on it later. Obviously the reporting standards in Wizarding Britain had risen dramatically.

The next few minutes were uncomfortable for Alain as well as for the crowds, a condition that only served to raise the tension even higher than before. He marched through the school doors unchallenged. He passed through the Great Hall and the massive crowd of students and concerned citizens fell silent at his presence. He stepped into the side chamber where his family had gathered and the aurors stopped at the door behind him to block it off with their presence.

Alain allowed the door to stay open. Was this a good omen? Ill? Most who watched on could not tell.

When he walked into the room, all talking ceased. Those gathered looked at him in a mixture of hope and fear. Alain looked around the room and took in the faces of those gathered here for comfort and for news. The center of the room was clear though there was seating along the walls. Alain's wife, eldest daughter, Segolene and the Grangers were all grouped together near a fireplace. Nathalie was there with her hands on Apolline's shoulders. His mother-in-law was between Fleur and Segolene, giving both girls much needed comfort. The Diggory boy and Miss Bones were in a group with the Grangers while Victor Krum loomed protectively over Hermione and Luna. Alain didn't miss the look Cedric shoot over to Fleur even if Fleur missed it. Mister Lupin and Miss Tonks were sitting together on one of the seats near his wife and child. There was a large cluster of redheads as well as a small selection of Hogwarts students from all four houses. The Slytherin girl next to Miss

Weasley was a surprise but not important enough to call her out on it. There were others, of course, but they were inconsequential now.

Before anyone could call him out, Alain drew his wand and cast a Patronus Charm.

"Come. They are all here." Alain called to the glowing silver hawk which then swiftly turned around and blurred away at high speed.

"Well Alain," Régine called crossly. "Don't keep us waiting. Why are you here?"

Alain turned an unreadable gaze to the woman and spoke. "It is not my place to say. This must be seen to be believed."

"For the love of God, Alain, plea-" Apolline had started but was cut off by a soft ringing tone and a disturbance in the air.

A ball of blue-white light formed two meters above the stone floor and began to grow and fall in a now recognizable pattern. Joy filled the room. Literally.

"Gabrielle!" Apolline cried in shock at the halo with beautiful white feathers breaching the air above its ring.

Momma! Her baby girl lyrically chirped in return.

Apolline fell to her knees on the floor and held her arms wide. "Gabrielle!"

Gabrielle's ring tapped the floor before gently dissipating into the charged atmosphere of the room. The girl then shot into her mother's arms with open wings, wings which quickly surrounded her Momma and squeezed tight. We won Momma, we got him!

Apolline didn't know nor did she care about the other two new arrivals in the room as her whole existence was focused on her nine year old miracle. Other people, however, did notice the other two arrivals.

"Yes well..." Harry called out, one hand on Aimee's shoulder in silent support of the young orphan. "We would have got here sooner but the aurors wanted to make sure I wasn't a dark lord and then it

took an extra ten minutes to explain that I was also not a child molester. Alain got tired of waiting so he threatened to fire everyone if they didn't release us from quarantine, so here we are."

The room was silent. Everyone gaped at the boy in open shock.

"Is there something on my face?" Harry asked his companion.

Aimee looked up at him. "I don't see anything."

"...harry..." Hermione whispered, a touch of hope lacing the name.

"Go hug Gabby some more." Harry told Aimee with a soft nudge.

She nodded and trotted over to the angel-mother hug fest. Aimee giggled a bit and latched onto Gabrielle's back. Angelic thrall crested through the room again with feelings of peace, love and devotion. Little Angel began to coo loudly in contentment.

With little Miss Devereux occupied, Harry took a step towards Hermione who was shakily getting up from her seat. "Hey, 'Mione. Miss me much?"

"Harry?" Hermione asked.

She reached out with her hand. Harry walked into her grasp allowing ten shaky fingers to run over his chest.

"It's what Voldemort had laying out for me when I got up." Harry said looking down at his rich cloak, silk button down shirt and slacks combination, all in black. "It's a bit creepy wearing a Dark Lord's clothes, I know, but there's nothing dark about the clothes themselves. We checked."

"Harry?" Hermione asked.

Harry stepped close enough to put his arms around Hermione, who was now a bit taller than he was, and pulled her close. He put one hand in the small of her back and the other hand behind her hair. He pulled her in close trapping both her arms between them and put his cheek against hers.

"I know we've been together nearly every night for months yet I still feel like I haven't seen you in forever. How does that work?"

"Harry?" Hermione asked.

"Harry, you're alive." Ron called out.

"Way to state the obvious, mate," Harry replied. "Now come over here and give us a big manly hug. I can't meet you halfway as it seems Hermione's legs don't work. I think I broke her."

"Bloody hell, mate, you're alive!" Ron jogged over to Harry and wrapped his arms around his two best mates since First Year.

"When did you get so bloody tall?" Harry asked Ron.

"You're a lot shorter when you're not floating about like a fairy." Ron shot back.

"Harry!" Hermione cried into Harry's chest as tears splattered over his shoulder.

"I love you too, 'Mione." Harry soothed.

Harry finally realized that the room wasn't silent anymore. It was a madhouse. The next time Hermione yelled his name he barely heard it even though her mouth was right at his ear. Everyone was shouting their approval or their support or their questions all at the same time. Not Harry's favorite situation to be in, but then Hermione and Gabrielle were in the same room so that made it easier to keep track of both his girls. The Great Hall must have been twice the madhouse this room was if the noise coming through the open door was any indication.

It would take nearly an hour for Hermione's vocabulary to expand past 'Harry'. He held her in his lap while telling bits and pieces of his story to anyone who came up to welcome him back. She let him hold her, arms still pinned between them, and absorbed his presence. Aimee came over to sit with them before moving off again three times. Once after Aimee walked back to Gabby, Harry lamented to the girl in his arms that he was too young to adopt. He did not want Aimee to live the life of an orphan if there was anything

he could do to prevent it. His saving maidens thing clearly ruled both his life and his afterlife.

He was back. He was back in her arms and he felt wonderful and he sounded wonderful and he smelled wonderful and he looked wonderful and when she was finally willing to move again she'd see what he tasted like too. Of course, there was that one comment he made that needed to be explained first...

"Harry, what was that about not being a child molester?"

"Mione. I come back from the dead and that's the first question you have for me?" Harry murmured. "Maybe I should just go back and ask Jeanne if she'd like to go on whatever passes for a first date in the afterlife."

"Don't you dare!" Hermione huffed.

"All I'm saying is-"

She growled, "Shut up and kiss me you prat."

Harry knew when to give in. "Yes love."

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The next day was Sunday and Mass was letting out in the Meuse Valley.

Alain suggested going to Mass as a way to have a bit of peace and quiet before Monday morning began to pull the family back to various schools and offices with hundreds of kilometers between them. Domrémy-la-Pucelle was to be the balm that soothed the nerves and brought the family back together. It even worked after a fashion. There were still issues but then there always would be. Only time could heal some wounds.

An offer had been made for Gabby to stay home from school for another week but she said no. She had Harry now so why would she be all broken and weepy and stuff – and she insisted that she would keep an eye on Aimee. The girls went everywhere together, hand in hand. The only time this changed was when Gigi began visiting more often to make the pair into a trio again as it always had been

before. Sadly, poor Miss Devereux was following in Segolene's footsteps quite well. Her aunt never liked children anyway and used Aimee's infamy as Gabrielle's betrayer to publicly shun the child. That is why Gabby was walking hand in hand with her 'abductor' everywhere they went. Wounds of the heart were best healed by love and Gabby had that in spades. Harry couldn't have been more proud of his Angel or his sort-of-adopted father Alain.

Domrémy-la-Pucelle did provide quiet contemplation... right up to the time one of the magicals visiting the shrine to the Angel Gabrielle recognize Harry and Gabrielle. That's when things got loud again.

There was a bit of excitement before the family managed to escape into the church of Saint Remy for an hour plus long service. Luckily even rabid fans of the Boy Who Came Back knew not to chase him into a church on Sunday morning. By the time the family was ready to go outside again, Alain's demand for an escort was heard and members of the magical press were pushed back by a line of aurors. Only a handful of locals had to be Obliviated and no hexes had to be reversed. It could have been worse.

"I can't believe I forgot what it used to be like for you, Harry."

Harry looked around, taking in people, places and things. He listened to the crowds and the cameras. He gazed at the clouds passing by as they brought the village from light to shadow to light again. He smelled exhaust and burnt oil from the cars and lorries that passed by. He focused on the young witch who's hand was in his.

"A lot of people were looking at you today as well." Harry shot back.

Hermione squeezed Harry's hand. "They were looking at my necklace, Harry. Most people who go to Mass on Sunday wear crosses, not ankhs. One woman was glaring so furiously I'm surprised that I didn't burst into flame right there in the pew."

"Imagine how she would have reacted were she to find out you are both English and a witch." Harry replied before adding, "You don't have to wear that everywhere, you know."

"But you gave it to me." Hermione answered and then smirked playfully. "And how many young witches can say that the Harry Potter has given them a gift let alone jewelry?"

Harry used his best pout. It didn't work. Back to the matter at hand... "Want me to get you a cross for your birthday?"

"I'm happy with my ankh, thank you very much." And she was.

"Good." Harry replied. "A cross would just remind me of Jeanne anyway. When I sneak glances at your baps, I do not want to be reminded of a Catholic Saint."

"And what do you think of when you look at my... ankh?" Hermione teased.

Harry took the bait and stared shamelessly at and around Hermione's necklace. The small gold charm tended to nestle into the top of her cleavage when she wore it under a shirt, though it was more common for her to wear it above fabric and in plain view. Now that he had hormones again Harry found himself checking his ladylove out with increasing regularity.

Still, there was the ankh to consider. His mind flashed back to a room full of priceless artifacts in a Veela temple. There was also an image of a bleeding palm. Gabby's palm along with the ankh cut into it. But Harry couldn't use those answers. A compromise then.

"I think of beauty, power and wisdom." Harry said with utmost confidence. "And breasts." There was a hint of a leer at the end.

"And when will I meet the woman who inspires such thoughts?" Hermoine challenged. Her hormones were battling with feelings of inadequacy that have been part of her since the first time she was shunned by a peer. At the age of six.

Harry smiled. This was a conversation he wouldn't have been able to have a year ago even had he lived through the Second Task. He had changed in indescribable ways. Smart as she was, Hermione did not possess half the flirting skills Segolene had, let alone Nathalie, and both have had their fair share of fun teasing Harry in the past year.

"Next time you look in a mirror."

Game, set and match to Harry. Hermione would randomly blush and smile throughout the rest of the day.

They toured Jeanne's childhood home. They walked the grounds around the church of Saint Remy. They lit devotional candles at the small outside shrine to Gabrielle. Gabby couldn't stop giggling as she tried to pray to herself. Eventually the extended friends and family of Harry Potter made it back to the Delacour home for some true peace and quiet.

Harry re-entered the home deep in conversation with Hermione and Luna.

"... and that's why the aurors asked me about my relationship with both Gabby and Aimee - why I was in bed starkers with one of them when aurors came in wands at the ready." Harry ended a rather embarrassing explanation.

"But didn't they ask how you managed to come back? It sounds like they focused on trying to ferret out how you got rid of Riddle." Hermione asked.

"I told them that Gabby worked a miracle and Gabby told them the same thing. We both gave them the same answer from different rooms. They 'knew' we couldn't work together to lie to them therefore it was true, yeah? We weren't left together without a chaperone even once after the portkey went off." Harry added with a twinkle in his eye.

Hermione and Luna glanced at each other. Like that was going to stop Harry and his angel from conspiring...

Harry continued. "They weren't too happy that I wouldn't explain how I got the Dark Lord to go away for good. In fact, I think they still believe he'll come back again... some of them anyway... but I did promise to talk with them about it if – and that is a big if – they end up having to deal with Riddle in the future."

"Harry?" A voice called from ahead of the three.

"Yes Apolline?" Harry answered.

"Gabrielle has something she wants to show you in the parlor." Apolline announced. "If you would please..."

Harry was surprised. He hadn't felt anything unusual from his Angel, not that he would begrudge her some privacy, but Apolline's voice carried a hint of seriousness to it. Harry looked to Hermione and Luna. Hermione didn't seem to expect Apolline's announcement. Luna didn't react at all, the dirty blonde was much more interested in the ceiling and its centuries old fresco.

"Okay?" He answered uncertainly.

Harry and the girls followed Apolline into the parlor only to find that Gabby was waiting for them... as was Alain and Fleur and Segolene and Aimee and the Grangers. Was there a family meeting called that he didn't know about?

"Harry?" Gabby called from the center of the room.

Harry looked into his Angel's eyes. He felt both pride and fear bubbling through the bond though Gabby made sure only pride was visible on her face.

Gabby took a cleansing breath and brought up her hands. Harry hadn't noticed until just then but she was holding his old Holly and Phoenix feather wand in both hands, the golden chain still hanging down one side.

"I... I think you might want this back now. It's yours. I really liked using it but you're back now and you should get to have your wand back too now 'cause it's yours..."

Gabby held the wand in open palms just waiting for Harry to say 'thank you for keeping it safe' or something. She felt so big and proud giving Harry his wand back. Wands were important. Really important. Even... even if it did feel like him and remind her of him and even if it was the most precious single thing she ever, ever owned. But it wasn't hers anymore, was it? Which was why she was so shocked when Harry gently curled her fingers around the smooth polished shaft and closed her fists over it.

"It stopped being mine when I left it to 'Mione, Gabby. And then she gave it to you, fair and square. But you know what?" Harry leaned in closer to the little witch. "The wand chooses the wizard, or at least that's what Ollivander told me. That wand chose you. It wants to be yours. I want it to be yours too."

Everyone who looked on as Harry and his Angel gazed at each other could tell that an intense love held these two together. Only half of them knew just what kind of love it was. Even those that did not could see that Harry and Gabby were at least as close as brother and sister and that 'little sister' was as devoted to 'big brother' as he was to her.

"Besides," Harry broke the silence, "I have a spare."

He pulled out the wand hidden up his sleeve. It was the wand Voldemort had on him, Dumbledore's old wand and Gabby's substitute. The silver end cap was still there and everything.

"It doesn't feel cold to me like it does to you. It works as well for me as your wand used to and the aurors let me keep it since your Poppa recognized it and told them to give it back." Harry smiled and slid the wand up into a pocket sewn into his sleeve. "See? I don't have to go buy another one or anything."

Harry pulled himself back from Gabby and immediately found two wide silver-grey eyes staring into his. Luna was practically nose to nose with him. Harry flinched.

"Er – Luna?" Harry forced out.

Luna didn't flinch. Her eyes did bounce back and forth between Harry's eyes and his sleeve. His wand sleeve.

"Have you ever read the tales of Beedle the Bard?" She asked him.

"No? No I haven't, Luna." Harry rallied. "Should I have?"

She stared deep into his eyes, into into his soul, and then she smiled brightly. "You have an invisibility cloak."

"Well," He replied, "technically Hermione has an invisibility cloak. Maybe I should ask to get that back. It really is a family heirloom, dead useful and loads of fun too."

"You don't have a stone that let's you talk to dead people, do you?" Luna chirped.

"I don't need a stone to talk to dead people."

"Hmmm..." Luna thought about it. "I suppose you are right about that."

And then she started humming. And then she drifted away. And that was the end of that.

"You know, Harry..." Hermione piped in, "I have a few other things that rightfully belong to you like the cloak."

"Oh?" Harry turned to face her.

"Your trunk... your bank vaults... some land in Godric's Hollow..." Hermione murmured.

"Oh. Oh, that!" Harry chuckled. "You know what they say, 'Mione."

Did she? Harry smirked at his catching her off guard.

"You can't take it with you, yeah?" He challenged. "And seeing as I crossed that border twice I feel I should be twice removed from it all. It's not my money or land anymore. It's yours."

"Honestly!" Hermione huffed. "Are you okay being a pauper without a knut to your name?"

Harry didn't lose his smile. He could have on account of his history, but he didn't.

"Mione. With the exception of those rare times when I went to Diagon Alley for school shopping or Christmas shopping, I've never had much money other than what I found on the sidewalk." Harry took in a breath, but not too big of one for he did not want the ex-Gryffindor to get into a proper rant. "I have you as my girlfriend. Gabby is my Angel. Luna, Fleur, Segolene and Aimee are like

sisters. There are two men in this room I would be proud to call dad and two women whom I would love to call mum. Honestly, 'Mione, if this is being poor then I'm fine with it."

There wasn't a single person in the room who didn't love Harry Potter after that. And if there had been a holdout then the Angel broadcasting pure love and serenity into the room would have melted even a Scrooge's heart. That's not to say that Harry would ever want for anything ever again because he was as good as adopted by the Delacours. Still, Hermione began thinking of ways to sneak Harry's money and things back to him. She had an idea or two right off. She blushed at them but she had them just the same.

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"So..." Cedric spoke up, not quite sure what to say.

It was Monday morning. Ced was having breakfast with the Delacours and the Grangers... and Victor... before heading back to Hogwarts and class.

"So." Harry confirmed.

The four champions were the last four at the table. It was as close to private as they were likely to get without using spells.

"Figured out what you're going to do now?" Ced asked Harry. "Will I see you in Hogwarts soon? O.W.L.'s you know... you still need them and your N.E.W.T.'s."

"Not really sure yet." Harry answered while staring down at his place. "You'll be out soon, right? Have any plans?"

Cedric shot a not so discreet glance over at the resident Veela Champion.

"As a matter of fact, I know exactly what I'll be doing. I won't even be out of Hogwarts for a week before starting at my new position."

"That was quick." Victor commented somewhat jealously. "I miss whole first year of professional career after Durmstrang and no sign of doctors letting me back on team."

Victor scratched at his shoulder. Harry narrowed his eyes at the action. A thought began to stir. That snake's venom must have been something special to have such troublesome long term symptoms. Harry remembered Danya and what the Healers said about her.

Cedric spoke up again before Harry could organize his thoughts.

"I've been offered a position – almost drafted really – as Minister Bones finds herself rather short handed while also trying to reorganize the Ministry. There's a big push to get rid of any perceived corruption that may still be in place even though the blood purist movement has been almost completely erased from Britain."

Fleur stared at him pointedly. She may have meant it as a challenge but he was still glad to have her attention.

"Granted, there are plenty of ignorant wizards that still believe much as Malfoy did, but they are all keeping away from the new regime and out of the public eye... and none of them have the money or influence that Malfoy or his group once had. Even the new Lord Malfoy isn't the threat his father was. Amelia has her eye on them anyway... But what I was going to say is that I'm going to join the Department of International Magical Cooperation which is actually going to be seeing a lot of growth this year."

Harry smirked a bit. It would be nice if Ced could get the Ministry to actually cooperate with other nations. He knew Amelia and Alain were working together quite often of late but he had wondered if all of this cooperation would dry up once the remaining Death Eaters were dealt with and the ICW pulled out of the British Isles.

Cedric continued. "I actually plan on joining the staff for several tasks that my father has been presiding over for years."

"But your father works in creature regulation, does 'e not?" Fleur challenged. It had been a sticking point with her for some time.

"Exactly." Ced confirmed. "His department will be losing some of their scope. Amelia believes, and I agree, that sentient magical beings who have their own societies or social order should be treated as equals and not as mere creatures."

"You mean like the Goblins..." Harry offered.

Ced turned his eyes to Fleur. "And Veela. Someone in the Ministry needs to be able to address the wants and needs of near-human and non-human magical beings with the respect they deserve. I intend to be that someone."

"Zere are no Veela families native ze British Isles." Fleur spoke neutrally.

"I want to change that – assuming it's not an environmental issue, of course." Cedric answered.

"It is not." Fleur answered. "I 'ave many cousins in Nordic lands. We don't mind cold."

Cedric nodded. Harry suspected that Cedric let out a breath he had been holding too.

"I had hoped not -" Ced blurted before changing direction and moving on. "My first task for the Department, one I'm not waiting for the end of the school year to start working on, is to go through the magical creature laws on record so that she can see what still works and what has to go. First up is getting rid of the Veela marriage statues, of course."

The message was as clear to Harry and Vic as it was to Fleur. Cedric knew what he wanted, he wasn't backing off and he was willing to work hard to get it. Fleur spoke next.

"Loyal and 'ard working. You are a credit to your 'ouse." Fleur said with approval.

"You should know zat ze Veela will soon reclaim what we lost centuries ago. We will be our own nation once more. I..." Fleur paused for a moment and made sure she had Cedric's attention. Not that she needed to. He belonged to her. "I intend to be an important part of zat nation at ze international level. If one day you speak to ze Veela nation on be'alf of Britain zen you will deal wiz me."

There were sparks flying between Cedric and Fleur, and Harry and Victor both tried to pretend they didn't see anything. Harry decided to speak up before things got out of hand.

"Here I am unsure of what school I should be going to and you two are taking the bull by the horns. Good on you."

Ced seemed to have heard him. "Harry. You're Gryffindor. When new Firsties ask the upper years what other houses are like, you are the example all of Gryffindor is judged by. I honestly can't imagine you anywhere other than the house of lions. In Hogwarts. How can you even think of going anywhere else?"

"Easy." Harry responded. "When I was still a just a Fourth Year trapped in a tournament I didn't enter, I had no real family to speak of. I had friends, good friends, but that was it. Now I have a family and every member of that family calls France home. France, not England. Even the Grangers and Luna are happy where they are."

"You expect Harry to go to school without 'Mione?" Vic snorted. "Vill not happen."

"Well said, mate." Harry thanked the Bulgarian Champion before continuing. "It looks like I'll have to ask 'Mione if she can help me whip up some transfer papers or enrollment forms or something."

"You should talk to Madame Maxime. My muzer can 'elp you no doubt." Fleur offered. "My beloved school would not be so foolish as to turn you away."

Harry slid into silent contemplation. It wasn't just Hermione that he was anchored to in life. Gabby held him also. Hmmmmmm... would they let him go to Beauxbatons as a day school? Or maybe let him see Gabby on the weekends... Of course, he was always with her but there was something about physical presence that spiritual presence couldn't match.

Vic scratched at his arm again. Harry noticed.

"Vic." Harry prompted.

"Yes Harry?"

"You said the bite's still giving you trouble, yeah?"

Vic scowled and nodded. Harry shared a glance with Fleur before addressing the older wizard again.

"Have the Healers given you any idea as to how long it will take before you're cleared to compete again?"

Victor's face was all the confirmation Harry needed. It would take a miracle for him to get back into the game. Perfect.

"Harry!" A sweet, high pitched voice called out from across the room.

"Hey there, Angel!" Harry called back to Gabrielle.

The little girl trotted up to the table of Champions and began to pout for her audience. She opened up her big puppy-dog eyes, tilted her head a little bit and began to draw short lines on the floor with her big toe.

"Momma is so mean, Harry. She won't let me go find a hospital and heal all the sick people like we did at St. Mungo's. I want to heal someone! It's not fair!" Pout, pout, pout.

Gabby looked for Harry's approval out of the corner of her eye. She got it.

"How would you like to get back on a broom competitively today, Vic?" Harry asked.

The large Bulgarian wizard looked at the tiny girl in front of him with something akin to hope. It was all over the press that she had indeed healed cases that St. Mungo's had given up on years ago. Maybe he wouldn't have to look for a career outside of quidditch after all.

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Time began to pass faster as the threat of Dark Lord Voldemort vanished once again from the UK and her neighbors. The British Ministry of Magic continued to rebuild itself into a new form, one which embraced reforms favored by their ICW allies. Students went back to school. Peace returned to the Wizarding World but there were still issues left to be resolved. Issues like blood magic.

The hearing on blood magic was high profile and highly publicized. Minister Bones wanted to have the hearing in London but ran into

French interference after Hermione Granger was served a notice to appear in court. The notice reached her as she ate breakfast in Beauxbatons. The Delacours protested. The I.C.W. got involved. Things moved to Bern. Various politicians and noted figures of the Wizarding World laid down what was 'known' about blood magic until Hermione Granger mounted the stage with Gabrielle Delacour on her left and Harry Potter on her right. Fleur, Victor and Cedric were all in attendance as character witnesses. With Harry and Gabby's stage presence and Hermione's solid documentation, they put on a very impressive and exhaustively detailed presentation on the light side of blood magic. It could protect. It could save lives. It could heal wounds thought to be beyond the reach of regular Healers. Yes, blood magic could be used for dark purpose but so could any 'light' magic. More research on the lost art was vital should magicals want to learn the true limits beyond what uses Lily Potter had pioneered. Or so the argument went, anyway. In the end, a motion to assemble an executive level inquiry was carried. With luck the bureaucrats might get around to opening the inquiry sometime in the next decade or so. Hermione, Harry and Gabby didn't win the day so much as they confused everyone about the issue. It wasn't their preferred result but it was better than having Neville, Hermione and Harry all thrown into prison for using forbidden magics.

On the bright side, Fleur was still not the Great Embarrassment her mother once feared. Yes, some of Nathalie's clients finally leaked Fleur's 'day' job to a wider audience but those who knew still kept quiet. Why? Nathalie was very pregnant now and Fleur ran the Garden. She literally had the Wizarding World's A-list celebrities and power players by their short hairs and she made sure everyone knew it. In fact, her seat of power may have even helped Hermione at the blood magic hearings. The Boy Who Lived Again's girlfriend had the support of both the Angel of House Delacour and the Succubus of House Delacour. Had anyone been threatened with actual prison time, Harry and Gabby would have had to do something and Fleur would have politically slaughtered whatever was left.

Life continued.

It was only after the school year ended and young magicals everywhere were given the freedom to travel that Harry's extended family were able to gather in any numbers again. There was a party for Cedric celebrating his N.E.W.T.'s and his new ministry position.

There was a party for Victor to celebrate his tenth consecutive victory on the pitch now that he played professionally again. There was another party too but this one wasn't for everyone. No. The list of who could attend was quite restrictive. It was also written in crayon on a linen napkin magically affixed to Gabby's bedroom door.

G.W.H.B.P.S.B.H.P.

No Boys Allowed

Silverware clinked on fine china. Giggles echoed up and down the room. Cake was eaten and tea was sipped.

"So Apolline is Fleur's mother..." a brown eyed redhead started.

Hermione nodded as she sipped from her cup, pinky extended daintily.

"And that Jean woman?" Ginny prodded.

"Madame Régine Mitterrand." Hermione answered. "Gabby's grand-mère."

Ginny's brow shot up and her teeth clinched. It looked painful.

"That is Fleur's gran?" The young witch hissed.

"Oui." Fleur stated simply.

Ginny tried not to flinch. She turned to the object of her envy.

"So not only are you ridiculously good looking but you're damn near immortal too?" She tried to be civil. Really she did. "Just how long do you Veela live anyway?"

The words drew a bit more of a crowd than there was before. That was a question that none of the English girls here knew the answer too. Not even Hermione.

Fleur sighed. "Lao Tzu once said zat a flame zat burns twice as bright burns 'alf as long. It is so for we Veela."

"Lao who?" Ginny countered.

Hermione grabbed the opening and ran with it. "Lao Tzu was an extremely important Chinese philosopher from the sixth century BC who was deified as the central figure of Taoism. His name and teachings have become immortalized in the muggle world."

Fleur chose to cut in before Hermione could expound on more of the man's history. "Ze point is zat while most witches can live past one 'undred ten and some may live decades more, few Veela live to see sixty years and only ze very lucky ones live to see seventy."

"Sixty?" Hermione looked shocked. Madame Mitterrand couldn't be far from that now. Ten, twelve years away at most.

Fleur nodded sadly. "Drugs and alco'ol. Abuse, slavery and murder. Zese zings kill far too many Veela before zey 'ave a chance to die naturally. My cousins are also victims of many illnesses zat strike non-magicals... when zeir fazers are not wizards zen ze share zeir fazers 'ealth problems."

Segolene slowly came up behind Fleur and pulled her close. "Régine asks me sometimes about Fleur's male suitors. Régine fears she will not live long enough to see her first great-granddaughter."

"But Nathalie..." Hermione offered.

"Is once removed from 'er line." Fleur returned. "Nathalie is one of Régine's sister's brood. 'er deceased younger sister, may she rest in peace."

The teenaged girls went quiet for a moment out of respect for the dead. Across the room, two nine-nearly-ten year olds continued to eat angel cake and play their games.

"What does your gran think of you and Segolene?" Not all that subtle but that's Ginny for you.

"She knows my 'eart." Fleur smiled a bit and leaned into the brunette behind her. "She also knows zat when ze time comes and my blood calls to me, I will mate."

Segolene spoke in support of her lover. "I will not deny Fleur the chance to be a mother just as she will not deny me the right to be one either. I only wish that I could carry her child."

Fleur's response was immediate. "As I would bear yours if I could."

Hermione almost raised her hand but then she stopped. This wasn't a classroom.

"I don't know about wizarding Healers but non-magical fertility clinics are working on that these days." She offered.

That got the undivided attention of all the other teens in the room.

"ow?" Fleur demanded. "I 'ave not 'eard of zis."

Hermione started. "It's... it's not something I know a great deal about mind you..." There were snorts at that. The British witch continued. "...but there has been a lot of progress in the last two decades in the field of in vitro fertilization. Prospective parents can have their eggs and sperm removed, united in a laboratory setting and placed within the future mother's uterus... even if that mother is not the original donor of the egg."

Both Fleur and Segolene stared hard at Hermione for a moment after the end of her explanation. Then they turned to gaze at each other.

"I..." Fleur stammered, "I could have your child."

"And just maybe you could have my son." Segolene pointed out.

Those who understood French gasped at the implication. A Veela bearing a son. That has never happened before. It could change so many things.

"Are you done eating? Aimee and I are done eating and I think it's time to start the meeting." Gabby jabbered.

No one could argue with her. In fact, a distraction seemed like a really good idea to most everyone. The two oldest teens didn't notice. Fleur and Segolene soon found that loving kisses were the best way to clean bits of cake from each others mouths.

"I, Hermoine Jane Granger, President of the Girls Who Have Been Personally Saved By Harry Potter do hereby call this meeting to order." Hermione rang in the meeting by tapping her empty tea cup with a spoon.

The other girls began to pay attention. Those who were standing sat. Those who were still eating angel cake put down their plates and forks. Those who were snogging, however, kept on snogging.

Their emotion was understandable, true, but it was time to move on to more lighthearted pursuits.

"Miss Delacour, Miss Royal." Hermione huffed imperiously. "Must I censure you publicly?"

The two oldest teens in the room slowly disengaged from each other. The others giggled and let out the occasional wolf whistle. Luna looked for Wrackspurts, searching extra hard in niches and corners far away from the snogging couple. Happy as she was for Fleur and Segolene, it still hurt. Stupid blood magic making her love Fleur like Segolene did.

"Very well." Hermione continued. "First on the agenda is old business. Fleur?"

It wasn't a cut on the Veela's age. Fleur stood to address the club.

"I 'ave learned zat Danya and her fiance will 'ave zeir wedding in Vidradne on ze first Sunday in August. Zey expect to be expecting in September. My family is invited and we may bring guests as well. Please speak to me soon if you wish to come wiz us. Gabrielle will give a blessing to ze 'appy couple as an angel; it will be ze first angelic blessing in what we Veela 'ope to be a new tradition."

There were hums of approval. Who wouldn't want a real angel to bless their wedding?

"Is there any more old business?" Hermione asked Luna.

The dirty blond shook her head.

"Very well." Hermione retook control of the room. "I move that the floor be opened to new business."

"Seconded!" Gabby loved playing the Stuffy Rules game when Hermione wanted to play it with her. It was fun.

"Thank you Miss Delacour." Hermione returned. "It must be noted that we have two guests who are here for indoctrination. I trust everyone has met Miss Weasley and Miss Devereux?"

There was a round of head nods and a couple of murmured yeses.

Hermione turned to her trusted lieutenant. "Miss Lovegood-Granger. Have both initiates met the two requirements of membership in this organization as codified by our charter?"

"They have, oh Verbose One." Luna intoned respectfully.

Gabby tried not to giggle. A small niggling of a smile on Luna's face betrayed her true level of respect for the President of Girls Who Have Been Personally Saved By Harry Potter.

Gabby didn't think Luna's answer was clear enough. "They're both girls and Harry saved them too!"

Luna nodded in support. Hermione huffed.

"All those in favor of granting membership?" Hermione asked the group.

Hermione raised her hand, and as she did Gabby, Luna, Segolene and Fleur all raised their hands as well.

"Six love in favor of expanding the group, Magister Granger." Luna answered.

"Six?" Hermione asked.

"You mustn't deny Venus Fornier-Black's wishes in the matter sister dear."

Hermione hmmm'd to herself. So the invisible girl from their first Girls Who Have Been Personally Saved By Harry Potter meeting

finally has a name. No matter, she would deal with Luna's imaginary friend in private but for now she had the votes required. She turned to Gabby and nodded.

Gabby hopped up and ran into her closet. Two seconds later she came sprinting back out holding her two largest hats. The little angel with silver-blond hair quickly summarized what just happened in French for Aimee's benefit. Then she distributed the hats.

"I want the pink one!" Aimee shouted.

"Okay!" Gabby agreed and handed over a very wide brimmed neon pink hat to her friend.

Ginny looked relieved at getting a pure white headpiece even if it would not have looked out of place at the Royal Ascot. Maybe it was the color she had a problem with.

"When did Harry save you?" Ginny jumped into a conversation with Fleur. She knew the stories of everyone save the two older French witches.

"At ze Zird Task." Fleur replied evenly. "From ze dementors."

"I thought Gabrielle did that." Ginny commented from under her new hat.

"Little Angel did toss out a patronus, this is true," Segolene defended, "But Harry Potter was that patronus."

"Yeah." Gabby interrupted on overhearing their conversation. "I have the best patronus ever!"

"True." Ginny agreed. A Harry Potter patronus did sound divine.

Speaking of new girls, Gabby took a quick look over at Aimee and had herself a thought.

"Your Highness?" Gabby began waving at Hermione. "I have a question!"

"You may address me as Madame President, Magister Granger or Miss Granger, Miss Delacour." Hermione answered.

Segolene began translating for Ginny.

Gabby ignored the censure. "Can Gigi join our club too?"

"Has Harry saved her life?" Hermione asked.

Gabby paused in uncertainty. "He beat Voldemort..."

"If him beating Voldemort were enough, every girl alive would be in our club, Miss Delacour." Hermione reasoned. "Do you want just any girl to be able to join our club?"

Gabby squirmed. She liked being part of a secret special club. She also liked her friend healthy and not about to die unless Harry saves her. She shook her head.

Hermione quickly surveyed the crowd and came to a decision. "I'm sorry Little Angel but Gigi can't join the club."

Gabby pouted big time. Aside from getting Aimee and Luna to cuddle with her, it didn't help fix things.

"Don't be so sad, Gabby." Ginny tried to console the smaller girl. "I let slip to Susan that I was going to be part of this club and now she's chomping at the bit to get in. Rumor has it that she's put a price on her own head just to become a 'distressed damsel' so that Harry can ride in on his Firebolt and save her before they fly off into the sunset."

"Mione's got tracking charms on him now." Gabby grumbled.

Ginny chuckled. "Wish I'd have known a tracking charm back before... you know. I would have tagged Harry with one first chance I got. Misses Ginevra Potter..."

"I thought you were done with all that." Hermione called from behind the redhead.

"That was before he came back from the dead." Ginny snapped. "The boy is too bloody irresistible! And he's in my year now – not a year ahead of me like before where I would gaze upon him from afar..."

Fleur, Segolene and Aimee were all slowly backing away from the disturbed British witch.

"Mione, could you pretty please with pixies on top dump him and send his arse back to Scotland broken and vulnerable? Arrgh! Why does he have to be so dreamy?" Ginny whined.

Hermione was not pleased. "Hell no. He's mine."

Grrowwwwll...

Gabby pitied the redheaded girl for she knew Harry's heart and Ginny would never get what she wanted. Luna looked on sadly and commiserated. She had her own unrequited love to deal with and knew how painful that could be.

"Our Lord is an awesome Lord indeed," Luna spoke up in 'support' of Hermione, "but it is our duty as His messengers to spread His love to the world, not to hoard it all to ourselves."

Hermione put a hand to her temple. "Luna, Harry is not the Messiah! He is an exceptionally wonderful young wizard with an admittedly close relationship with the world's only known living angel. These things do not a god make."

Gabby preened. There were fighting over how awesome her Lord was. This was great!

"Well..." Luna wavered. "It did take him a whole year to come back from the dead. That carpenter's son did it in only three days."

"But then he was in his thirties when he pulled that trick," Segolene gleefully poured petrol on the fire, "so our Harry is much more impressive pulling the same trick at less than half Jesus's age."

Aimee leaned over to Gabby and asked what the older girls were fighting over. Gabby explained. Aimee told Gabby she really liked this club. Gabby totally agreed.

-o\0/o-

Harry relaxed in his chair and sipped at his drink.

"It's ever so peaceful here." His companion called from across the table.

"Umn." Harry grunted. "I hope it stays that way. They could make the mistake of turning it into a sort of tourist trap or something."

The view was quite nice from three floors up and his balcony overlooked a fair sized lake, one he first encountered when it was covered in ice and snow. Of course, it was summer now and the lake was a beautiful wavy mirror with birds flying in lazy circles through the sky above. The island of Edem wasn't visible from here but Harry hadn't expected it to be. Aside from angelic transport, the only way to even see the island of Edem was to pass through the ancient brick portal... a portal now hidden in the back of a new museum dedicated to the ancient settlement that once hugged the lake shore. Marion's use of modern archeological techniques revealed artifacts that her granddad and great-granddad had missed and now a not-so-secret effort was being made to translate 'newly discovered' Scythian rune sets.

And then there was the balcony Harry was currently relaxing on. Harry was currently enjoying the view from a new low rise housing block which would soon house a great Veela colony; Edem would become their magical nation's capitol. The once abandoned village was now a hive of construction with several buildings going up at the same time and it was that burst of construction that had Harry hoping for restraint before the natural feel of Edem was lost.

Long brown curls shook back and forth. "I can't see Fleur letting that happen. This is the spiritual homeland of the Veela race. It would be sacrilegious to allow too much development."

The soft buzz of a turboprop aircraft could be heard in the background.

"Does a new airport qualify as too much development, 'Mione?"

"It's five kilometers out and the flight path does not pass over the lake. Apolline told me as much last week." The young witch returned.

She lowered a book she had been reading and looked at Harry.

"Why didn't you go with her?"

Harry's gaze drifted over the lake.

"I am with her."

"That's not what I meant." She huffed.

Harry paused a moment. "The other Veela would wonder why a boy was allowed on their island. It's a question we don't want to answer so the safest thing to do is prevent people from asking it."

"But what about lessons?" Hermione pressed. "You still need them, don't you? You said that Gabriel and the others still had plenty of lessons for you."

Harry put down his drink.

"I am with her and my lessons continue as planned." Harry chose not to mention that his hard earned skill in magics of the mind was more than sufficient for the task. His time spent in other people's dreams had been good for something after all. Hermione's own experience should have clued her in to that.

Harry smiled as a wave of understanding passed through his girlfriend's features.

"You do still enter my dreams at times, don't you?" She saw the agreement on his face. "I suppose you must bring the Hall of Angles to you instead of going to it."

Harry smiled and tapped a finger to his nose. "That's my 'Mione."

She basked in praise for a moment before remembering a new bit of gossip. "So... what do you think of Cedric's proposal?"

Harry's smile got bigger. "An international school level Quidditch league? Brilliant! I don't know why they haven't done that before... I can't wait to play!"

"Are you so sure you'll qualify for the team?" Hermione teased. "You haven't played a real game in two years..."

Harry huffed in indignation. "I won my first game even though I still wasn't sure what all my teammates actually did. Get the snitch or die trying!"

"And if you have to face off against Hogwarts and Gryffindor House to get it?" She asked in real curiosity.

"I hear Ginny's the seeker now." Harry mused. "She'll be more of a challenge than Malfoy, I'm sure, but I'll get the snitch in the end."

Hermione smiled warmly at Harry. He had as much as admitted that he would be wearing Beauxbatons blue next fall. The young wizard has been taking private lessons with tutors since his 'return' and next year he'd join her at Beauxbatons as a 'regular' student. They would not be in the same classes but they would be in the same school. Beauxbatons had broom cupboards, right? As long as they got to act the part of boyfriend and girlfriend outside of class, they would be fine. The year after next would see 'Mione, Harry and Gabby in one school all at the same time even if it was to be Hermione's final year.

Hermione had another thought and suddenly her warm smile turned into a wicked smirk. She rose from her chair, sashayed around the table and took Harry's hand in hers.

"Do you want to go upstairs?" She asked.

Harry looked at her oddly. "This flat hasn't got an upstairs."

"Oh, honestly!" Hermione huffed. "I cannot believe a teen aged boy in this day and age hasn't watched enough telly to get that reference."

"Blame uncle Vernon." Harry returned. "So what's the reference mean?"

Hermione smirked again. She could fix this. "It means, Mister Potter, that I am offering to snog you now that no one is around to stop us. We are two young people who have managed to misplace our chaperones and I feel like messing around a bit."

"Oh..." Harry's eyebrows flew up. "Oh!"

The now alert boy shot out of his chair and held the door open for Hermione to head inside.

"In that case—" He called an octave higher than normal. There was a cough before he forced his voice lower again. "In that case, I would very much like to go upstairs. After you milady."

Hermione giggled and trotted inside. Harry followed with a leer and a quickening pulse. They were without chaperone and would be so for a good hour or more. Of course, their chaperones today were Veela so the code of conduct on this trip was different from what it would be were they under the strict watch of Headmistress McGonagall or the elder Grangers.

When in Eden, do as Adam and Eve did, yeah?

...

Gabrielle stood at the edge of gently flowing waters and looked up to the infinite stars above. The glen was just as beautiful this time as it was every other time she visited. She loved the Hall of Angels with all her heart.

"Hey, kid!" A welcome voice called from nearby.

Lucifer! Gabrielle chirped as she turned and jumped at her spiritual big sister.

Big angel spun little angel around in the air a few times before setting her down and giving the kid a few tickles. Gabrielle shrieked happily as her body shifted to it's more human form. It was hard to stay angel through good tickles.

"It's been a while sweetheart, what kept you?" The lavender eyed woman asked.

"I was busy?" Gabby asked. "Momma said there was too much to do before."

"I'll bet. It worked, didn't it?" Lucifer winked at Gabby.

Gabby lit up. "Yes! Harry's alive again and he's even better as a boy than a ghost! And he let me keep his wand and he's going to go to

school again and he's teaching me to fly on a broom soon and he says I could be a seeker just like him too! It's great!"

Lucifer laughed at the younger girl's enthusiasm.

"Oh, and we beat Voldemort too! He's gone, won't come back!"

"Wonderful!" Lucifer clapped in support, and so to did Gabriel.

"Gabriel!" Gabby squealed and launched herself at the brown eyed angel.

"Yes, very well done young one. I could have done no better in your place. We are all very proud of you."

Gabby cooed in joy even without wings or feathers.

"We are proud of you... In fact, I want to reward you for your efforts." Gabriel teased. "Would you like to see your reward?"

Gabby hugged the larger woman even tighter and nodded into her chest.

"Very well..." Gabriel nodded to Lucifer over Gabby's head and Lucifer stepped back.

A tight surge of love, joy and peace flooded the glen as Gabriel changed quickly into her angelic form. She continued to hold the smaller girl close even as a golden ring of magical fire formed, grew and dropped around them. When the loud ringing of Gabriel's halo faded to a quiet hum, the two angels separated. Gabby looked around.

"We're in the tomb of the Seven Sisters, aren't we?" Gabby asked.

Indeed they were. Seven beautiful women were immortalized in art around them, above them and below them inside the smaller temple on Edem Island. Bright sunlight shot through the oculus rendering all of the artwork in an unearthly beautiful glow.

Yes. Gabriel replied to Gabby's question. It is here that I will show you something, something wonderful. Something I will only ever be able to show you once.

"What?" Gabby was bouncing in excitement.

Gabriel held up one finger in a silent request for patience. Then the archangel reached one hand into the plumage of her own wing. One perfect feather with soft brown spots was removed.

And now I will show you something very special.

The archangel began to move the point of her feather in her left palm. Though there was no incantation, Gabriel soon coaxed out a small pool of her own blood.

The angel then knelt down onto the floor. Using her blood as ink, Gabriel drew a small, tight pattern of elegant lines onto a small patch of stone about one meter from the center of the floor. Gabby didn't recognize any of it as runes but it certainly did seem to mean something special. Soon the design was complete and Gabriel stood up again. Gabriel then presented her lightly blooded feather to Gabby.

Gabby was a bit confused that Gabriel, or rather the magical being made in Gabriel's image, would give her a feather that couldn't leave the Hall of Angels but she accepted the gift just the same.

Gabriel explained, One day your control of magic will advance well beyond the restrictions of a magical focus such as the wand your Lord gifted to you. Before that happens though, you may find yourself in need of a new wand. Take this, my own feather, and take it with my blessing. One day you may need it.

Gabby was very thankful. Confused, but thankful just the same.

The archangel then stepped into the exact center of the mausoleum. She bade Gabby back up a few steps and spoke.

The script at my feet is my name as it is written in the very first script I was taught in the very beginning.

Gabriel drew her wingtips together to summon her halo a second time. Once again the golden ring grew and dropped low, but this time Gabriel did not leave. Instead, her magic reacted to the blood script on the floor and the lines in her name began to glow in a bright

golden light. Almost immediately after that, dozens and then hundreds of names began to glow near hers. The golden magical script linked one name to the other and then another and then another. Soon, every one of the names were joined together in a perfect circle around the center of the floor. Gabriel held her position right in the center of the circle.

This is my Lord's name, His Word, as it is written in script. His Word is perfect and unbroken. It is made of the names of all the angels who served Him. I will join Him now, and when I do we will be together once more for eternity, as it was meant to be.

Gabriel was paying close attention. She didn't really understand what she was hearing, but she payed attention just the same. In the back of her mind, Harry payed attention too. You just don't hear this kind of thing every day.

I have watched you and your Lord learn and grow these past few years and I am well pleased with the love and spirit you two share. Live your life. Follow your heart. Express your love in the world around you. Do this and the two of you shall never know despair.

"Okay?" Gabby responded.

Seeing as she was in her angelic form Gabriel could not smile, but she could influence her thrall and waves of amusement mixed into the serenity flowing out from her being.

My Lord's age is at an end and yours has just begun. Fare thee well, Gabrielle, daughter of House Delacour, Angel of House Potter. May you know peace and love all your days.

"Goodbye!" Gabby returned. "I love you!"

Gabriel released one last pulse of pure love like a magical kiss on the cheek. Her halo flared brightly and a stiff wind kicked up inside the room. Gabby's ears began to ring between the howl of the wind and the hum of Gabriel's halo. Suddenly, the halo became a shaft of golden light which stretched from the ring of names up through the occulus above. Gabriel's form became indistinct. The elder angel became light itself, and when that light faded she was gone.

The wind settled and the noise dropped... and Gabby found herself alone in the mausoleum of the Seven Sisters.

"Gabrielle!" Well, at least Gabby was only alone for a few seconds. "What happened? What was all that light and noise? What are you doing in here?"

"Fleur?" Gabby was really confused. "How did you get in the Hall of Angels?"

"How did you get out of the Hall of Angels with out going by me first? And just what is that in your hand?" Fleur shot back.

Gabby's eyebrows rose in confusion... which slowly became excitement. Her gaze once more fell to the brown spotted feather in her hands. The feather with just a bit of fresh angel blood on the tip.

"An archangel gave it to me?" Gabby answered uncertainly.

Fleur wasn't sure what to think. "Let's get you back to Maman before she has a heart attack."

"Okay." Gabby answered obediently. "I can keep the feather, yes?"

Fleur looked at the feather even as she took her sister's arm and lead the girl out. "I don't see why not."

The two sisters went back outside, and with each step Gabby became more and more excited. An angel feather. Gabriel's feather. An archangel's feather. A real live angel feather and it wasn't one of hers. Wow.

...

Half-way into a rather heated snogging session, a flushed face shot up and green eyes stared out through the large window facing the lake.

"H-Harry?" Hermione panted from beneath the startled boy. "What's wrong?"

In spite of the fact that Hermione's shirt was mostly unbuttoned and Harry's hands had just been roaming over very wonderful places,

the boy straightened himself out and moved closer to the glass panes and the glittering water they revealed. Something out there had caught his attention so thoroughly that not even soft feminine flesh could compete. As Hermione looked on in confusion, Harry moved as close to the glass as he could without going through it.

"Harry?"

Harry's pupils narrowed to better adjust to the outside light. His brow furrowed in an attempt to see from here what Gabrielle was seeing from over there.

Harry gasped.

"Harry, what is it?" The young witch on the bed was beginning to get concerned. One hand went to a shirt button just in case they needed to leave soon.

Harry turned to address Hermione, shock clearly on his face. "Did you see that?"

She looked back and forth between him and the window. "See what?"

Harry turned back to the window. "The gold. The shaft of light. Did you see it?"

Hermione slowly shook her head. "No. I didn't see anything. Should I have?"

Harry slowly disengaged from the glass panes. When he turned back to his girlfriend, his face revealed a level of peace and happiness that tore through her anxiety and settled her nerves. He couldn't look like that if something had gone wrong again.

Harry seemed to shake himself free of the unexpected feelings and turned his focus once more to the exposed bra and heaving bosom – er, eyes of his lovely girlfriend.

"I love you. You know that right?" He grinned.

Hermione smiled and nodded. "And I love you. Of course it never hurts to remind me. Often."

Harry's grin turned into more of a smirk. A small golden ankh was stuck to the sweat in her cleavage and since there was no snitch in view Harry decided to go after the one golden shiny thing he could see.

"You remember my first ever Quidditch match, don't you 'Mione?" Harry asked, eyes sparkling.

"Of course I do." She playfully huffed. "How could anyone forget that game?"

Harry looked back down into her cleavage. He attacked. She squealed. After another few minutes of fun in which Harry never let his golden prize escape his lips, Hermione spoke up.

"Harry?"

"Uh-hummmn?" He replied around the captive ankh.

"I - I told Fleur and Segolene about your first match once... and... and Segolene joked that I should get a tattoo." Hermione admitted, face burning in embarrassment and excitement.

Harry seemed very interested. "You, Miss Books and Cleverness, are telling me that you are considering getting a tattoo?"

Hermione's face burned even hotter. "Well... you see... Segolene managed to drag me to a tattoo parlor at the beginning of the summer. I... I already got it."

She had his undivided attention.

"Would... would you like to see it?"

His 'Mione, his stuffy British bookworm got a tattoo? Oh hell yes he wanted to see it.

Harry silently thanked any God listening that his life got mixed up with the Delacours on that fateful February morning when he took a spear to the chest to save an eight year old's life. He couldn't imagine what his life would be like now had they both lived through that ordeal. He didn't want to imagine it.

When Harry finally did see the snitch, he swore by Jeanne that he was beating Victor to this one.

End Chapter

Epilogue To Follow

(deleted scenes below)

Chapter Notes:

Only the epilogue is left now. The epilogue will be of the 'years later' and/or 'many years later' variety.

By some miracle, I have made it all this way misspelling an important character name. It's Viktor Krum, not Victor Krum. Vik, not Vic. When I finally sweep the whole story for a last cleaning pass, I expect I'll change it over. Nobody called me on it? That is the most surprising thing, really.

It hasn't happened yet, but there will be a sort of reference to canoncansodoff's Movie Night at the Grangers below. There are some good stories on canoncansodoff's page if you haven't been there yet.

Deleted Scenes (Canon? Yes. Plot-laden? No. Fluff? Pretty much.):

Scene 1: The Scientologist

"So there she was: young, hot, fifteen and on her way to meet her cousin for some family errand or other while still wearing her school uniform..." Segolene spoke over her audience.

"I was not wearing my uniform." Fleur whined from Segolene's right.

"Shush you." Segolene censured her love. "I'm telling this story. If you want some boring historical account, you tell it yourself."

Fleur backed off quietly. To the rest of the girls who belong to Girls Who Have Been Personally Saved By Harry Potter, it was clear which member of this sapphist pair wore the pants behind closed doors. Segolene cleared her throat.

"As I was saying..." The perky brunette continued, "Fleur was being her normal delightful beautiful self – in her school uniform – when she entered the Garden – that's the name of Nathalie's place – and almost stumbled over a recently divorced Tom Cruise who was chatting up the front desk attendant for the night."

"Don't forget Brad Pitt..." Fleur added.

"Yesssss..." Segolene seemed almost annoyed. She must really be into telling stories her own way. "Brad Pitt was there too."

"Both of them?" Hermione asked incredulously. "But they starred in Interview with the Vampire. When Madame Maxime allowed that film to be played in the Dining Hall I could have sworn an area affect love spell must have been released. Practically every witch in school drooled over Brad Pitt posters from that night to the end of the year!"

"I can not be sure," Fleur offered, "but ze two may 'ave been in town togezer discussing zat very film. It 'adn't been filmed yet."

"Anyway," Segolene cut back in, "so mister Top Gun himself sees this absolute vision in blue with her long silvery hair and her deep blue eyes and legs that should really get an award of some sort..."

Fleur blushed a bit at the praise. Segolene doesn't usually praise her physical attributes in public. In private yes but not in public. Segolene kept going.

"...and Tom get's it in his head to sing that song in Top Gun that his character used to woo the leading lady."

"I was not impressed." Fleur murmured.

"She was incensed." Segolene stated. "She told him to get lost. It was about that time that the attendant hurried over and apologized profusely to Tom by telling him that Fleur did not work there and that she was, in fact, a real schoolgirl as the uniform implied..."

Fleur may have murmured something about uniforms again but it was too quiet to hear.

"...and that was when Brad walks over and says 'Crash and burn, Maverick. Crash and burn.'"

"I practically flew out of zat room looking for Nathalie, I was so embarrassed." Fleur grumbled as the crowd giggled at the story.

"You could have negotiated something," Segolene suggested coyly, "you were of age."

"No zank you." Fleur shivered. "'e was still zere when I came back down from Nathalie's office. He tried to apologize to me, which was nice I suppose, but zen 'e started to tell me about some religion... Science somezing or ozer. I was not impressed. I left and 'ave not seen 'im since."

Hermoine almost pissed herself laughing. Tom Cruise tried to convert Fleur to Scientology? Harry had to hear this... assuming Harry knew who Tom Cruise was which was not a sure thing. Hmmm. Maybe a movie night or three was in order for this summer's calendar. Movie Night at the Delacour's. That could work.

It was Luna's turn next, and she chose to talk about the first time she kissed a boy. Really kissed a boy.

Scene 2: Sky Captain and the Moon Girl of Tomorrow

A door opened and two teens stepped through, one witch and one wizard.

"This is where you expect to find the... what again?" The boy asked.

"Blibbering Humdinger." The girl answered with an airy detached voice. "They are very, very rare. I almost cornered one in Hogwarts' astronomy tower but Headmaster Snape must have scared it away."

"Well, Luna." He tried again. "I'm still not sure what they look like. Can you give me any clues to go by? Do they hide in shadows? Inside of books? Are they usually invisible or something? Anything?"

The boy, a strapping young man in Luna's opinion, turned to look around the room. He was honestly trying to help. Luna thought that was adorable. It made her nefarious plan all the more enjoyable now that she found a boy who at least gave her the benefit of the doubt.

Made her feel special... a bit tingly inside even. Luna had plenty of time to magically lock, silence and notice-me-not the door while her young man was distracted actually looking for rare magical creatures.

"Don't worry Captain Lambert." Luna called. "The hard part was following their trail into this room. They have no way out now and I'm fairly certain you will know them when you see them."

"Very well... and my name is Léon." Léon replied with a rather roguish smirk before turning to look around the dust, debris and detritus near a large dormer window.

Luna saw the smirk. He didn't do that before. Had she been found out already? Perhaps undoing her top shirt button on the way upstairs gave away the game plan? No. She refused to back down. As the older wizard searched for rare magical creatures, Luna applied some lipstick and a bit of mood enhancing perfume. Novelty store stuff, not the illegal to brew kind.

Luna centered herself and whispered into the air. "This one's for you, Sirius."

She then turned around and walked over to the upper year wizard while doing her best Veela impression. Swing those hips, arms too, and make it look natural and sexy without going too far. Having spent a great deal of time in Fleur's presence, she pulled it off remarkably well. Captain Lambert certainly took notice when he saw her approach.

As Luna tried to raise the good captain's pulse, two rare magical creatures peeked over the top of a dusty oak bureau. No, they were not Blibbering Humdingers.

One of them began to sniff its own crotch.

"Bad doggy, Padfoot!" Myrtle hissed as she floated further behind their cover. It wouldn't do to be caught out now.

Padfoot whined a bit and used his best spectral puppy-dog eyes on Myrtle. It didn't help his case at all.

"Remember," The dead British witch whispered, "That girl is doing this for you so you better not spoil it for her. Got it?"

Padfoot nodded. He'd be good from now on. Promise.

"Oh, look mistletoe!" The two ghosts heard Luna shout. "No wonder all the nargles congregate in this wing of the school."

Two spectral heads peeked around the bureau once more to see that Luna was pointing to a section of the roof rafters directly above herself and Léon where there was an enormous patch of mistletoe. Coincidentally, she was also standing a lot closer to him than before. They were almost hip to hip.

Myrtle and Padfoot both watched eagerly as Luna tried to close the deal. It didn't take long for Padfoot to begin panting happily or for Myrtle to begin openly leering.

The Delacour Veela hadn't needed Luna for any altar consecrations, so she needn't maintain her chastity on their account. Luna would finally get to make good on her promise made to Sirius during his memorial service. Giving herself to a nice young man is just the kind of thing he would have wanted, and the wishes of the dead must be honored.

End Deleted Scenes

Insert standard legal disclaimer and boilerplate notes here.

...as seen previously on The Little Veela that Could...

Harry seemed very interested. "You, Miss Books and Cleverness, are telling me that you are considering getting a tattoo?"

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She had his undivided attention.

"Would... would you like to see it?"

His 'Mione, his stuffy British bookworm got a tattoo? Oh hell yes he wanted to see it.

Harry silently thanked any God listening that his life got mixed up with the Delacours on that fateful February morning when he took a spear to the chest to save an eight year old's life. He couldn't imagine what his life would be like now had they both lived through that ordeal. He didn't want to imagine it.

When Harry finally did see the snitch, he swore by Jeanne that he was beating Victor to this one.

The Little Veela that Could

Epilogue

September 17th, 2005

"What time is it, sister dear?" A young woman with long dirty blonde hair and silver-grey eyes asked as she sipped on a glass of wine. She and her sister dear were stargazing on the Delacour maison-forte's upper terrace.

"Quarter to nine, Luna." Her companion replied. "Thank Heaven for house elves..."

Luna smirked. "Yes, putting the children to bed would have been a chore for just the two of us."

Luna looked pointedly at Hermione's swollen lower half. Hermione flinched but not from her sister's attention. The baby was awake and kicking. She put a hand over her baby bump and tried to rub the sore spot away. Luna looked closer - this time she looked at Hermione's hand as it attempted to rub away the pain.

"Still no ring, I see..." Luna commented, a hint of disapproval showing.

"He's asked," Hermione offered looking down at her unborn child, "believe me, he's asked – and not just because of this. I have a career. The teaching and the research take up enormous blocks of time. We don't really spend all that much time together these days, me and him."

"You two spend a lot of time together. I have it on good authority that when the two of you do spend time together that you share a bed... even pregnant as you are..."

Luna waited silently for the real reason.

"I don't want to come between Harry and his angel." Hermione near-whispered. "Gabrielle deserves more."

Luna snorted. "She deserves more does she? She deserves more than the most intense bond anyone could ever imagine? They deserve more than a relationship that makes the holy bonds of matrimony and tax shelters seem insignificant in comparison? It's like placing nargles before humdingers with you..."

"And you want me to accept 'insignificance'?" Hermione challenged.

Luna snorted again. "Harry would give you anything within his power to give... Sadly for us, turning grown witches into angels is one thing that is not within his power. You know we both would have become angels years ago were this not true. And you could use a year or two off to let your hair down anyway. I'm quite glad he got you preggers, really. Let's see you go another whole year working day in day out with no breaks when a wrinkly little poop factory is suckling on your teats."

It was true. The Harry giving part not the suckling monster part. Well, maybe that part was true was well but that's not the point. Hermione couldn't deny Harry's love when he expressed it so often. She was bearing his child and fully expected to do so again in the future. It was an odd family they were building but it was full of love and happiness.

"Speaking of unwed mothers," a voice called out from behind the two women, "how is everyone not named Fleur?"

Hermione nodded to Segolene and pointed to an empty chair.

Luna spoke first. "I've told you before. Zeus came to me as rain one night whilst I meditated at the Oracle of Delphi. I came home with a new appreciation for ancient Greece and some psomi baking in my very own oven. But you must understand I can't marry Zeus. He won't return my owls."

Hermione translated the lightning god reference the only way that made sense to her. "Perseus doesn't look anything like Harry, Luna. Even if Harry does travel around with you from time to time and the two of you... umn..."

"Harry and I don't shag on our trips, sister." Luna defended hotly. "Harry is no slut and neither am I for that matter except that once in Helsinki when I - anyway... I look for Snorkacks and he looks for orphaned magical children. The point is, I haven't shagged Harry. Perseus has no Potter blood in him so he's free to marry one of Harry's daughters should you ever bear him one. No risk of incest at all."

At this, Luna took a sip and focused on Hermione's stomach. "If you bear a daughter, please consider naming her Andromeda. I want my boy to marry the right girl under the right signs."

"Harry looks for magical children?" Segolene interrupted. "Why haven't I heard this before?"

"Orphaned magical children." Luna corrected. "His own childhood was bad enough that he didn't want another little witch or wizard to suffer through a childhood like his. Doubly so when he did a little digging and found that Tom Riddle was an orphan half-blood just like him."

Hermione smiled in admiration for Harry's life running an orphanage for magical children. He would change the world just like everyone wanted him to but he would not do it the way they all wanted him to. He was dead set on fixing the world one broken heart at a time.

"He has been telling everyone who would listen that how we treat children shapes world history. A childhood full of love as opposed to lacking love can be the difference between Minister of Magic and Dark Lord. And it's not just wizarding children either. Did you know he has two Veela under the age of five and a young goblin as well? Poor little Bluntaxe... barely out of diapers and his father lost an honor duel. His daddy dies, his mum gets claimed by the winner and he gets thrown to the curb. Of course Harry snapped him up before any shady characters could disappear down Knockturn Alley with him."

Luna picked up Hermione's narrative. "Potter House is quickly gaining an international reputation for picking up strays. The I.C.W. has even had a debate over granting funds and manpower to Harry's cause. That first measure was narrowly defeated but I expect the measure to come up again next year with stronger support."

Luna turned a twinkling eye to her adoptive sister. "Do you have any idea how much time he spends in libraries when he travels the world looking for his little lost lambs? I swear sister dear, marry the man and you will not regret it."

"Yes!" Segolene cheered, "Follow Fleur Diggory's example, won't you?"

"Sorry to hear about that." Hermione consoled.

"Don't be." Segolene interrupted. "Fleur got concessions from Cedric's family. In exchange for taking his family name and for using a fertility clinic to bring young Charles into the world, the Diggory's will welcome me and mine into the family and Fleur and I can have our Happily Ever After."

"Fleur wanted to bear a son anyway." Hermione returned.

"She carried little Charles Diggory but he's also mine. I supplied the egg. This means that Fleur didn't have to give anything up, really. She was going to take her husband's name anyway but used the threat of staying a Delacour to give her more to bargain with. She spends more than half her time out of country, but then so does he these days. What with all the travel and the international negotiations, I honestly expect Cedric to advance to the I.C.W. in a few years."

"And the father of your child?" Luna asked the brunette.

"It's Cedric." She conceded. "I'm Fleur's forever, but we do share a bed with him on occasion. And it helps with the in-laws that they think I am Cedric's consort rather than Fleur's."

"Didn't you go to the clinic too?" Hermione scrunched up her face in concentration. "I'm quite sure you did."

"Guilty as charged!" Segolene sang. "Fleur supplied the egg this time... I can't wait for Cedric to realize that my Adrienne is a Veela!"

If Hermione had been drinking at the time, she would have done a spit-take.

"You're daughter is a Veela?" The pregnant witch blurted out.

Segolene beamed and nodded furiously. "Veela magic is clearly carried by genes. The womb the child is carried in makes no difference for her Veela heritage... though we do suspect it will have an impact on her magical abilities to have two witches and a wizard as parents. Three is magically stronger than two after all."

"Shall I write that down for you Professor Granger?" Luna teased. "Perhaps your revolutionary treatise on the History of Magic Before the Time of Merlin could use some more biological elements. Perhaps a new volume on sentient magical husbandry... something to explain Hagrid and Professor Flitwick."

"At least Madame Mitterrand got to meet her great granddaughters and great-grandson before she passed." Segolene replied softly.

"Could... could meeting little Charles be what pushed her over the edge? She was rather ill before that." Hermione asked Segolene.

The brunette thought about it for a minute before slowly nodding her head. "It just might be... she was very traditional. Having an angel in the family was a source of great pride for her but it was also a shock to her system. Fleur bearing a son must have shattered her world order. Well even if it did kill her I'm sure she died with a smile on her face."

There was a brief moment of silence as the stars glittered in the sky above.

The short coven would have been only too happy to continue prattling on were it not for an odd buzzing which seemed to emanate from a lower floor of the building. The three witches went silent. Their eyes snapped down and too the right when a strong blue light seemed to pierce the windows of an adjacent wing. The light climaxed with a bright flash that shattered all of the windows in that wing of the building.

Luna was in the middle of drawing her wand when two hands held her back. Hermione and Segolene were holding her down and both were shaking their heads no. Luna's face must have shown her confusion.

"Happened just like this last time too." Hermione explained to her sister. "Give them a minute to sort themselves out."

...

A little earlier in the night in a different room of the maison-forte, a little girl was having trouble staying upright. In fact, she couldn't really be considered conscious. She was in full crash mode after coming down from a sugar high earlier that night.

"Up, baby. Arms up and then hold still. We need to get you into your robes." Maman called.

Maman took the girl's hands in hers and began to pull little arms up.

Waking back up was hard... she groaned out her defiance but when Maman did let go of her arms she kept them up rather than dropping them. Someone behind her dropped a large set of robes over her head.

Crystal blue eyes snapped open as she pulled out of her daze. She squinted against the glare of the bright powder room lights as her Maman and a few other women moved about arranging this or that while she sat there and held still. Holding still... what horrible words grown-ups used to torture their little girls. Especially when those little girls would much prefer the sweet dreams of a good night's rest.

The young girl squinted until she could counter the glare and see clearly. The room seemed familiar... this was her cousin's house, right? Looking into the mirror, she could tell that the robes were really nice. They were beautiful even if they were a bit heavy... and they were too big by a few centimeters in just about every direction.

"Where is Doggie?" The girl groused.

Maman snorted. To call her own father that...

"I told you he can't be here." Maman answered. "This is a very important ceremony, only certain people may be there and you are at the center of it Little Star. Simone, do something about the size, will you?"

Maman's little star heard some whispering behind her. Soon the robes fit her perfectly.

"So, what's it like... at the temple?" One of the women she didn't know asked.

"Oh, it's wonderful. You absolutely must go." Another one answered.

Maman ignored them and worked on giving her Little Star a Heidi braid. It was nearly done; the ring of woven hair was almost a full circle around her head and Maman was teasing small groups of hairs into hanging loose just right. Maybe if she weren't so sleepy Little Star would be happier to have her Maman working on her hair. Maman rarely spent time to do such little things by hand when enchanted combs and hair pins would do things faster. Maman's hard work did make Little Star's silvery-blond hair look very pretty though - like a queen wearing her crown – so maybe this was all going to be worth it.

"I heard that the gardens are magical." The conversation between grown-ups continued. "They say you leave feeling years younger."

Little Star has heard this conversation before... lots of times by lots of different women. Edem, they called the place. Would she get to go to Edem herself one day? Maman said she would. Soon even.

As two women started debating which pair of shoes was the better choice, Little Star looked at herself in the mirrors. Her heavy outer robes were white. The silk layers under her robes were white. Her stockings were white. All seven shoe options were white. All the little flowers mixed into the braid in her silver-blond hair were white.

Gold! There! She smiled. They let her keep her necklace. She was allowed to carry one item, a symbol of her life with her to where it would happen, and she told them that this necklace was her life. Her godfather gave her this necklace. He said that one time back when he was just a kid Doggie got one just like it for her godfather to give to a girl he loved. He owed it to her 'cause of what Doggie did for him, he said. An ankh, he called it. It was pretty was all she cared about.

She felt an odd tingle under her robe down by her ankle. What was that? Little Star looked down and kicked her feet back and forth. There! She saw it! The soft white glow of something – or rather someone hitching a ride and being sneaky about it. Silly Doggie! Shhhhhhh... don't tell Maman!

"It's time, my beautiful shining star. Follow me."

"Yes, Maman." The little girl replied.

She was beginning to feel better. Not as tired. Happy, even.

She remembered what they told her was going to happen. They told her she was going to feel things she hadn't ever felt before. Her Great Aunt once said that she should just let the Change take her. It was natural.

Little Star was going to be a big girl soon. Would her cousins and Maman and Doggie say she was a big girl now? Would Doggie finally stop singing 'Twinkle Twinkle Little Star' to her all the time? That song was for babies.

Eight forty-five. Little Star found herself in the middle of a ballroom, the Delacour Family ballroom. It was the place where she spent many an afternoon or evening playing with Auntie Gabby and Harry and all her more grown-up friends.

Maman told her to stand right in the middle and Little Star did what she was told this time. She couldn't help it if she had a problem with - what was it Auntie 'Mione called it? Respecting authority? Auntie has a lot to say about fathers who are more boys than men. She has even more to say about bad doggies.

"Now sweetheart." Maman called. "Please stand there. Do not sit or walk around or dance... just stand still."

Oh, no! They'd put her in time out, hadn't they? She hated time out! What had she done this time?

"Why, Maman?" Pout. Pout. Pout.

"Something wonderful will happen, baby. It may make feel odd, but it will be over soon and then we can have a big party!"

So she wasn't in trouble... but she was still in time out anyway. This sucked. Sort of. Actually, she was feeling pretty good. She's never been forced to stand in once place and felt good about it before. Maybe this didn't suck. Wonder why...

"We just had a party," she thought aloud, "for my birthday. What's this one for?"

"This one is special. It's all about the change Great Aunt Apolline told you about."

Little Star's eyes lit up. They had talked about this. And not just with Great Aunt Apolline either. Her godfather, Auntie Gabby, Auntie Fleur and Auntie 'Mione have been over to her house lots since last summer. She just forgot about it when she got sleepy. This was the Big Day. The day she had been waiting for forever, like a whole year even. "Okay!"

And so, surrounded by Veela and wrapped in a heavy ceremonial robe which had long openings down either side of the back, Little Star just stood there and waited.

A door opened behind her and someone called out even before she could turn around to see who it was.

"Star light, star bright, first star I see tonight; I wish I may, I wish I might, have a little star in my arms tonight." A man's voice called out in English.

"Harry!" Little Star abandoned her spot on the floor and took a flying leap at her godfather.

Harry Potter was in a room full of Veela but he wasn't comatose on the floor. Of course, being what he was for Gabrielle did change things for him. He shared blood with an angel. That provided an immunity of sorts... Veela thrall was weaker than angelic thrall and Harry could even resist his Angel if he wanted to. The other Veela in the room knew this but they also knew to keep silent about it. Those that weren't family were priestesses after all and every word that left Gabrielle's mouth was Law to them. Gabrielle wanted Venus's Rite of Change to be a secret of the temple and they would hold their tongues. Their Goddess wanted a man to attend the Rite of Change for the first time in Veela history and they would not complain.

"Hello, Little Star." Another familiar voice called happily.

"Auntie Gabby!" The little girl dropped off the only man in the room and jumped onto the most wonderfully awesome Auntie ever. Auntie Gabrielle was an angel. A real one.

"Alright, Venus. You've had your hugs." Great Aunt Apolline called from the other side of the room. "Please go back to the spot your mother put you."

Venus Lucifer Fornier-Black - for that was the name her mother gave her - sighed heavily and skipped back to the spot Maman put her a minute or two ago. After stepping back into place, Venus turned around and blew kisses at Auntie Gabby and Harry.

"Love you, Daddy!" Venus sang across the room.

As Harry grinned and blushed, a soft whine came from under Little Star's ceremonial robes.

"What?" She demanded looking down at the hem of her robe.

A cloud of see-through light floated out from under her robe and took the form of a sad spectral dog.

"Padfoot." Harry greeted. The ghost dog changed into a pouting man.

"Venus... Baby... please..." The dead English Lord whined at his little girl. "We've been over this."

The nine year old nodded her head in agreement.

"Yes. We agreed that you are my ghost daddy and your name is Doggie." Someone nearby snorted. They knew she knew it wasn't really true but Harry and Doggie both liked tricks and so did Venus. "Harry helped bring me up when Maman needed to go do stuff. He's my living Daddy where you are my dead daddy. I'm keeping both of you."

Sirius pouted but it was hard to go against Venus here. One man changed her diapers and one just floated around the room sniffing butts.

The grown-ups chatted back and forth for another few minutes before Little Star began fidgeting. Venus began to shift back and forth from one foot to the other.

"Are you okay. Little Star?" Nathalie watched her daughter closely. This was not how she remembered Fleur's change going. This was how Gabrielle's change went. She knew that when Harry asked his goddaughter if she wanted to be like Gabby last year that Venus said yes, but how much do children understand when you ask them such things? Still, Little Star made her choice and Harry accepted it; they had a small ceremony involving a blood magic ritual one year ago to the day in preparation for this night.

Harry really did love Venus like she was his own child and in his mind nothing was too good for 'his' Little Star. She wanted to be like Gabby and he was going to make it happen.

"I'm wonderful, Maman." Gabby spun in place once before setting her foot down and shifting back and forth between feet again. "Maman?"

"Yes, Little Star?"

"I love you." Venus loved her Maman sooooo much. She really did! Did Maman know that? Did she really?

"I love you too, Little Star." Nathalie answered her child.

Harry and Gabby looked at each other knowingly. They were beginning to feel it. Both of them.

A squeaky, tittering giggle rang out through the hall.

"Thanks! I love you, Harry! And I love Maman and I love Doggie and I love Auntie Fleur and Auntie Segolene and I love Auntie Hermione and Auntie Apolline and I really love Auntie Gabby lots-"

Venus was hopping up and down on the balls of her feet while her words drifted in and out of English. As Venus jabbered on, her vision became kind of fuzzy and it was hard to focus.

It was a minute past nine o'clock and the moon was very, very full.

That feeling that Auntie Gabby and Harry had was building and now every Veela in the room could feel it. Even the free floating dogfather could tell that something was different.

Both Harry and Gabby slowly edged closer to Venus.

"I love you Daddy Harry!" There was a sing-song quality to her words this time. To anyone paying attention, love and joy just seemed to radiate off of the white robed little Veela in waves so thick they almost distorted the air around her.

"I love you too, Venus." Harry cooed as he knelt down in front of the little Veela. Gabby slipped behind Harry and focused her radiant blue orbs on the smaller girl. Harry held his arms out wide. "I love you this much!"

Venus was quivering in place. Her arms weren't that big! How was she going to prove she loved him more? In the back of her head, Venus remembered that she was supposed to let something happen. Something wanted to happen. Maybe that something would help her beat Harry?

"I love youuuuuuu...this much!"

The words 'this much' weren't words so much as they were song... something between a spoken language and the trilling notes of bird song.

Venus threw her arms open wide but she did more than that. Straining with every fiber of her being, she lifted onto the balls of her feet, threw her arms open and spread her wings.

Her pure white feathery wings.

Every Veela, ghost and Lord of Angels in the room was rooted in place, looking in awe upon the little angel that came to be in the center of the room. The nine year old angel cooed softly prompting the nineteen year old angel to transform in reply. The volume of love, joy and feathers in the room quickly doubled.

Gabrielle spread her wings wide in answer to Venus's showing, and in doing so she showed off her colors. Though the older angel began her career with feathers as pure and white as Venus had now, Gabby was slowly developing a soft yellow and goldenrod pattern. For Gabrielle and the Lord who observed this change as it happened over the years, it was a miracle all it's own.

Gabrielle summoned her halo in a now natural reflex. Blue-white magical fire spun and hummed above her head as a sign of her natural power.

A soft, sweet trill of happiness passed through Venus's beak at the sight. So pretty!

"Such a very, very good girl you are, Venus." Harry ran his fingers along the new angel's white feathery cheek. "You are every bit as pretty as Morning Star. I can't wait for you to meet the woman your Maman and I named you after."

Venus pushed her cheek into Harry's hand, reveling in the loving touch. As she lost herself in this new level of tenderness from the man who had been her Daddy for years and was now her Lord, her wings began to move up of their own accord. Her outermost left and right wing feathers nearly touched about a meter over her head.

In the small gap between Little Star's wings, a magical spark ignited. Without conscious thought, she pulled the wingtips apart and gave the magical spark room to build. After a brief flash, two points of electric blue fire appeared, one near each wingtip, and quickly began to accelerate around an invisible point between them. Less than a second later, a solid glowing halo of magical fire was buzzing in the air above Venus's head. Soon a beautiful ringing tone filled the air.

To the surprise and delight of all involved, another magical change was triggered as soon as Venus finished creating her first halo. Something inside of Gabrielle changed in response to the existence of a new angel tonight, something that had never changed before. Her blue-white halo fire flared brilliantly before changing from blue-white to a bright silver ring of raw magical power.

After admiring Gabrielle's new look for a moment, Harry pulled himself together again and took a few steps back. No need to tempt fate now that Venus had her halo. She didn't know how to control it and he remembered what happened when Gabrielle went through the change.

Venus was in heaven, but she wasn't alone in the room. Harry had done good, he said she was a good girl. Why was Maman just standing there? Was she crying? No, Maman, don't cry! Maybe if everyone felt how much she loved them, then Maman could be happy again.

Venus brought her wings down, and as she did the halo of electric blue fire followed them down. As her wing tips separated, the halo got larger, never straying far from the feathers that spawned it until they touched the floor.

As soon as Venus's halo touched the smooth wooden floor of the Delacour family ballroom, its tone changed to one of a giant church bell being struck and magical fire released in a blinding wave that blew out in all directions. Though Harry and Gabrielle managed to

hold their ground, every Veela engulfed by the wave was knocked flat and the back windows were completely blown out. Such was the force of Venus's love.

...

Luna would soon learn that Hermione was right as usual. It only took a few minutes for all of the Veela and other guests to leave the ballroom and filter into the lower lounges and halls. There would be merriment well into the morning and most of their guests would be taking guest rooms if they slept at all.

Soon enough the three witches found their way to an elated group of Veela, young girls and the handful of men who were waiting out the end of the rite inside. Harry was helping Venus make sure that all her guests got thank you hugs. Next to Harry, Gabrielle was glowing as though she were a new mother herself. Maybe it was how her own angelic form seemed to react to being a 'big sister' but her luminous eyes flashed brighter occasionally when she glanced between Harry and Venus.

Gabby saw the three witches looking at her and smiled brightly. Harry looked at them and waved briefly before turning his attention back to Venus and the handful of teen Veela who were introduced as Edem temple priestesses earlier in the night. The priestesses were already doing their level best to spoil Venus rotten.

"I swear to God." Segolene commented while staring at Gabby, "I never thought I would meet another girl better looking than Fleur... but would you just look at her?"

"I don't understand what he sees in me when he can go back to that every night, or rather summon her to him..." Jealous much, 'Mione?

"She is still a virgin." Luna stated bluntly.

The other two stared at her like she had just grown two heads, a reaction she was able to judge from experience do to her traveling adventures of the past ten years. Good times.

"No, really." Luna continued. "Harry swears that all they have to do is cuddle and kiss just a little bit and they're so blissfully happy that taking it any further than that is unnecessary."

The two looked at Luna like she'd just grown three heads and six arms - and that has never happened before.

"I believe that their relationship is more spiritual and magical than it is physical. Really, their physical bodies just get in the way it seems."

In a world full of time dragons and giant acid spitting toads, neither Hermione nor Segolene could counter that.

The party would last all night, not that Venus would make it more than another hour before needing to go to bed. Harry and Gabby would escort Venus to Edem the next day and after an island wide game of Hide and Seek with the priestesses, the three of them would enter the Hall of Angels. Harry wanted to see how Lucifer would handle meeting the little angel named in her honor. Magical construct or not, Morning Star would meet Little Star with tears of joy in her eyes and eternal gratitude for Harry on her lips. Venus represented to her what she alone among the seven sisters failed to have after the Fall. A daughter.

Some years later, Segolene's daughter Adrienne would join Gabrielle and Venus as the third angel of the House of Potter. A year after that would see Harry's Veela orphan girls from Potter House join the angels of House Potter as well. The ranks of angels never grew quickly but they would grow and the world would once again feel the guiding hand of Messengers as they spread their Love throughout the world.

In this new age there would be many angelic acts of healing, many punishments, many miracles and signs but as any of Harry's 'girls' would tell you the real magic they performed was to heal the ills of the world one broken heart at a time. They worked in direct defiance of the Greater Good doctrine of sacrificing the individual – without said individual's knowledge - in the interest of the unnumbered masses. The few or the one did count. They counted a great deal.

Tom Riddle didn't care for the individual nor did Albus Dumbledore, but Harry Potter did. He cared a great deal. And since he cared, his angels cared. And they would act when needed. Just as he would want them too.

And they all lived happily ever after...

...unless they were bad guys; they would end up dieing in fire.

Epilogue Notes:

Holy shiat, it's done. Give me some time to wrap my head around that.

If LVtC were a movie, then this is where I would show the list of reviewers as if they were part of the cast and crew. If you reviewed this story before I finished it then you had your own part to play. Not Leading Lady per say... but maybe 2nd Key Grip or something. Production Designer perhaps.

Bonus: An amusing non-canonical scene wherein things don't go well for Harry Potter...

Harry Potter was alive. That was the good news.

Harry was in custody of the I.C.W. and had been for more than four hours. He was in a small concrete room with no windows and only one rather solid looking door. There was a table and a few chairs. All the chairs were very uncomfortable. That was the bad news.

There was a large, muscular auror looking down at him from across the table. The auror didn't look very impressed with the Boy Who Came Back Less Than A Day Ago. Harry was beginning to think this was the worse news.

"Let's try this again, shall we?" The auror started in simple accent free English.

Harry sighed and nodded.

"You were found in an abandoned home in a dusty bed that clearly hadn't seen use in several decades."

Harry nodded before replying. "That's true, but the bed was a stone altar and I had been tied to it by either Voldemort or Bellatrix Lestrange before I got free. Before I was alive, that is... my corpse was tied to the altar."

The auror continued. "You were found nude with your arms wrapped around an underage girl, one Gabrielle Delacour, who was sitting on your lap in the middle of the bed. The girl had been kidnapped earlier in the day."

"It was part of Voldemort's plot to possess my body, enslave Gabrielle and unleash a new wave of terror and death across both the wizarding and muggle worlds." Harry answered with conviction. "You're lucky Gabby and I managed to stop him."

The auror did not look impressed. "Aimee Devereux was also in the room. She is also underage. Both girls show signs of shock, abuse, blood loss and recent magically healed wounds. Surely you can see how we might be concerned about the facts as I have presented them."

"They were kidnapped by Voldemort and Lestrangle!" Harry nearly shouted. He was sick and tired of people thinking the worst of him just because Very Suspicious Shite always happened to him and never happened to anyone else. "We beat Voldemort and banished his boney arse back to Hell but Bellatrix was out cold on the floor. Interrogate her!"

The auror was still not impressed. "Bellatrix Lestrangle was declared criminally insane in nineteen eighty one during her trial. Nothing she says can be used as testimony in a wizarding court."

"You should still ask her for her side of the story." Harry grumbled. "No one ever asked Sirius Black what happened..."

"He publicly admitted to be at fault during his arrest." Unimpressed auror was unimpressed. "And you should know that we did, in fact, question Lestrangle."

"Really?" Harry perked up. "What did she say?"

Harry may have noticed a small flash of something behind the auror's eyes, but he couldn't be sure. None of the man's facial muscles moved.

"She was only too happy to explain how she and her young, powerful master were going to have, and I quote, 'rough mudblood monkey sex' while abusing the two underage girls in a wide variety of

unspeakable ways until her 'godlike green eyed master' finally commanded Miss Delacour to end Miss Devereux's worthless life. Then Lestrage would use Miss Devereux's corpse as a centerpiece on her dining room table and you would use your new slave girl to enslave the masses." The auror's eyes glinted like diamonds. Vicious, angry diamonds.

Harry shrank back in his chair.

"Yes well... I can see where you get the clinically insane ruling out of that. Once again we are lucky I managed to keep the Dark Lord Tom Riddle a.k.a. Voldemort from possessing my body and running amok." Harry dug for an idea of how to dispute this man's version of events. Gabby, he thought. Surely she would be able to help his cause... "Did you happen to ask the 'underage girls' for their version of events yet?"

If anything, the auror's eyes got even glintier and more angry diamondy.

"Miss Devereux is catatonic. We don't know when we'll be able to get anything out of her. Miss Delacour, on the other hand had quite a bit to say." Harry released the breath he had been holding. Gabby would set these blokes straight. "She went to great lengths to say how wonderful you were. She told us how much she loved you and how she always would. She told us about how you loved her and you would love her forever and ever. She told us that her heart belonged to you and that she would do anything you said because you were the most wonderful boy that ever lived. She said that she loves holding your hairy wand... that it makes her feel special when she makes it work. She said that your blood mixed with hers and that it feels wonderful when she feels you inside of her. That's even after the first time you were with her was scary and hurt and made her cry for days. She now loves being touched by you and feeling you inside of her and she dreams of being yours until the end of time."

Oh damn. The auror was visibly angry. Oh shite, shite, shite.

"Do you know what happens to young men like you when you find yourself in prison, Mister Potter?" The auror asked. Harry quickly shook his head no. "Young men who touch little girls find out what

it's like to experience that relationship from a whole new perspective."

Shite shite shite! Harry didn't care about being on the right side of the law anymore. He wanted out of here. The very second the auror left Harry's 'room' he was going to summon Gabby and get the fuck out of town.

The heavy metal door squeaked open and another man entered the room.

"Mister Potter, this is Mister Devereux." The auror stated. "He is a distant relative of the second young lady you were with earlier in the day. He has a few more questions to ask you."

The auror began to stand up.

"Haven't you all asked me enough questions? Where are you going?" Harry pushed desperately.

The auror looked back at Harry. His calm emotionless mask was back.

"I'm going out for a cigarette break." He called.

The auror then drew his wand and cast a few charms at the door.

"Oh, dear." The auror said to an eager Mister Devereux. "I seem to have accidentally disabled the monitoring wards for this room. Perhaps I can call for a repair crew to take care of that when I get off my break."

The auror left. Mister Devereux stared hard at Harry for a moment before beginning to take things out of his cloak in preparation for the next round... of... questions? There was pen and paper there but there was also a role of duct tape, a length of pipe and a toilet plunger. A dirty toilet plunger.

Oh bloody bugging shite!

The End of the End